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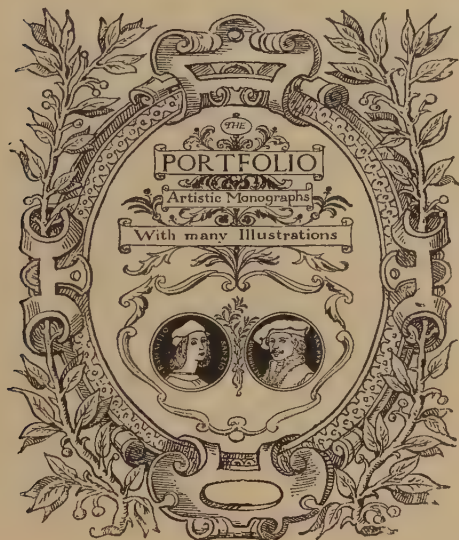
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ANTOINE WATTEAU

By

CLAUDE PHILLIPS

Author of "Sir Joshua Reynolds," "Frederick Walker," &c.



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ANTOINE WATTEAU

CHAPTER I

“O ciseaux enrubannés de Watteau, quel joli royaume de coquetterie vous tailliez dans le royaume embéguiné de la Maintenon!”

EDMOND ET JULES DE GONCOURT.

THOSE who, not content with submitting to the irresistible fascination of Watteau—that greatest of small masters, whose art influenced and coloured the eighteenth century as did the art of no other painter—strive to follow out the successive developments of his style, and to give colour and solidity to the mere outline of his figure which is before us, find the way still barred by many difficulties. It is not that sources of authority are lacking, for these exist in profusion, even when we have put aside the accumulation of romantic legend and anecdote which modern criticism has now discredited, without, however, in all cases, replacing the rainbow-bubbles of conjecture by something more solid and enduring. These authorities throw a sufficiently vivid light on certain salient points in the career of the pensive painter of gaiety, but leave in the most annoying fashion other wide spaces in dim half-light, or even in complete obscurity. The natural result is that the genesis and progressive developments of the master's art have been not so much ascertained as guessed at, and that his human as distinguished from his artistic personality still remains in shadow. This side of the subject—the shadowing forth of the real individuality which we even now so imperfectly know, the reconstruction of the true man from his work—is beyond doubt full of fascination, but also of peril. It affords so wide and so unfenced a field for that conjecture with which modern criticism of the so-called psychological order loves to surround what it examines. All the more must one in approaching it be careful not to lend to the artist who was born

when the *Grand Siècle* was ending, and lived when the eighteenth century was yet in its youth, too much of the nineteenth century languor and the nineteenth century self-consciousness and introspection.

It must be conceded that the revival of the interest in Watteau, the artist and the man, of a desire for the serious study and comprehension of his art as a whole, is due in a great measure to the brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt; although in qualification of this statement it would be unjust not to recall, while omitting many things that could be cited, the exquisitely true, and in the real sense of the word instructive criticisms of Bürger (T. Thoré)—especially on the Watteaus which entered the Louvre with the La Caze Collection—and the memorable page of description which Théophile Gautier accords to the painter's masterpiece, the *Embarquement pour Cythère* of the Louvre. It was the rare good fortune, moreover, of the Goncourts to unearth and republish, as an appendix to the sparkling essay on their favourite painter, the lost *Vie d'Antoine Watteau, peintre de Figures et de Paysages, Sujets galants et modernes*, read to the Royal French Academy of Painting and Sculpture on the 3rd of February, 1748, by the artist's whilom friend, the Comte de Caylus. This discourse, too measured and frigid in its praise to be called a panegyric, too superficial, too little intelligent in its criticism to have much value as an appreciation, is nevertheless of the greatest importance as a record of facts essential to the consideration of Watteau's art, and to the reconstitution of his life. It is the work of one who was at the most fruitful time of his career his close companion, and had unsurpassed opportunities for observing his practice and penetrating the secrets of his technique. There is nevertheless something repulsive in the unsympathetic coldness with which Caylus notes his friend's eccentricities and the infinitely sad if not precisely heroic incidents of his rapid decline and death. His discourse has, with all its deficiencies the same kind of authority as one of the "Lives" of Vasari; that is, it requires modification and correction in many vital particulars, but still constitutes the basis upon which the modern biographer of Watteau must rest. For his latest years the memoir which the picture-dealer Gersaint wrote in 1744, as a preface to the *Catalogue raisonné des diverses Curiosités du Cabinet de feu M. Quentin de Lorangère*, is a still higher authority; and the worthy citizen, though by no means an out and out panegyrist, shows in his simple biographical sketch a full

measure of that intuitive sympathy, the want of which so jars upon us in the aristocratic critic and amateur.

The Catalogue raisonné of M. Edmond de Goncourt, which appeared in 1875, gives a fairly complete list of Watteau's paintings, and a practically exhaustive one of the engravings done after both painted and engraved works. Where the eminent critic has himself seen the works which he describes, his comment is, as might be expected from the ardent student and eulogist of the eighteenth century, singularly suggestive and original; but unfortunately in treating of the Watteaus outside France he is obliged to trust to hearsay and the opinion of others. Seeing that at least two-thirds of the Valenciennes master's paintings, including some of the very finest, are now in Germany, England, and Russia, this seriously detracts from the authority of M. de Goncourt's volume, and quite deprives it of the definitive character which might otherwise have been claimed for it.

On the occasion of the memorable exhibition of works by old masters, which took place in Berlin in the year 1883 to celebrate the silver wedding of the Crown Prince and Princess of Prussia, there was brought together, almost exclusively from the royal palaces of Berlin and Potsdam, such a series of works by the charming "small masters" whose activity belongs to the earlier half of the eighteenth century as has hardly been seen in our time, even in the Louvre itself. There were in the exhibition nine Watteaus, among which at least two of his masterpieces, twelve Lancret's, and twenty-five Paters, to say nothing of other eighteenth-century artists with whom we are not for the moment concerned. To commemorate this exceptional event in the artistic annals of Berlin, the late Richard Dohme, than whom no critic, even among Frenchmen, possessed a more accurate knowledge of the painters and styles of the last century in France, wrote for the *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* (vol. iv., 1883) a short biography of our master, with special reference to the exhibition, which is assuredly one of the most precious contributions that have been made to the subject.¹ Nowhere else has so serious an attempt been made to trace Watteau's artistic development through his extant works, and to arrange these—hardest task of all—in something like chronological order.

¹ See also a series of articles by M. Charles Ephrussi on this exhibition in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1883 and 1884.

Finally, the *doyen* of French critics, Paul Mantz, whose quite recent loss France now mourns, summed up in a biography of Watteau, which first appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in the years 1889 and 1890, nearly all that is at present known of his life and artistic career, eliminating at the same time much that appeared on examination to be either mere legend or pure invention. Treating his subject with that enthusiasm for a national glory which is so stimulating when it is combined with a wide and comprehensive technical knowledge and an impartial judgment, Mantz nevertheless disclaimed the idea of writing a definitive life of his hero upon the facts gathered together and added to by him, pointing out in particular the impossibility, to-day when private collections are shifting and dissolving with provoking rapidity, of making a complete catalogue of his works in which the grain should be winnowed from the chaff. Like M. de Goncourt he was much hampered in his task by a too incomplete acquaintance at first hand with the originals of the works which he was called upon to discuss.¹

The bibliography of the subject would be incomplete, indeed, without some reference to Walter Pater's charming sketch, "A Prince of Court Painters" in *Imaginary Portraits*, though it does not profess to be more than a delicate structure built up of fact and of fancy suggested by fact. None the less is the Imaginary Portrait one of rare subtlety and charm, finely embodying with greater reticence and less vividness the modern conception which we owe to the Goncourts.

Watteau narrowly missed being not only in race but in nationality a Fleming. On the 28th of February, 1677, the army of Louis XIV. invested Valenciennes, and on the 17th of March in the same year carried all the defences and took the city. The new frontier was marked out by the treaty of Nimeguen, signed on the 11th of August, 1678, which left Valenciennes definitively to France. The mere fact that Antoine was born at Valenciennes in 1684, a French subject, does not, of course, make him more truly French than an Alsatian or a Lorrainer born within the last quarter of a century in his province would be truly German. It is not this mere accident of his birth, but the subsequent development of his

¹ Among other recent works on the subject may be mentioned the "Watteau," by John W. Mollett in the "*Great Artists' Series*" (1883), and a monograph treating of the Valenciennes master, by an accomplished Danish critic, Herr Emil Hannover (1889).

genius in the forcing atmosphere of Paris, which made him truly, in one sense, what he has been called, "the most French of French painters."

Antoine was the son of Jean Philippe Watteau and Michelle Lardenois, and was baptised in the church of St. Jacques at Valenciennes on the 16th of October 1684. Mantz, following Caylus, calls the father *un modeste couvreur*, that is, a tiler, thatcher, glazier; but a countryman of the painter's, M. Cellier,¹ following up Gersaint, has unearthed entries in the local archives showing the father to have been that very different thing, a *maître-couvreur*, that is, a master of his trade, a person to whom important pieces of work, of which M. Cellier enumerates several, were confided. The point, though seemingly trivial, is not without importance in its bearing upon another one which confronts us at starting—that of the nature of the rudimentary education as a painter which Watteau received before quitting Valenciennes. Already at this stage we find statements absolutely at variance the one with the other. Caylus, in his trenchant summary fashion, says that hardness was the dominant character of Watteau's father, and that it was with difficulty that he made up his mind to apprentice him to a painter of the city. Another and a truer friend, M. de Julienne, not less deliberately states that his parents, notwithstanding the mediocrity of their fortune and condition, neglected nothing that could conduce to his education; and that, consulting his natural inclination for the career of artist, they placed him with a middling painter of the city. The only point on which the conflicting authorities agree is in heaping scathing though vague epithets of reproach upon the head of Watteau's first master. Seeing how degenerate were already the Flemish and Dutch schools in the last years of the seventeenth century, and how meagre the best must have been at that time in the border city, never an artistic centre, and now a sort of perpetual tramping ground for regiments marching and counter-marching, this contemptuous description of Antoine's first teacher might have been deemed to meet the natural probabilities of the situation. We now know him, however, to have been Jacques-Albert Gérin, the head of the guild or corporation of St. Luke at Valenciennes, and we must abate a little of our scorn since, though a mediocrity, he was at any rate a respectable one.²

¹ Cellier's *Antoine Watteau, son Enfance, ses Contemporains*.

² Mantz enumerates works by Gérin, still to be seen in various towns of French

It would appear that Antoine entered the studio of Gérin in 1698, and that he remained with him until 1702, in which year his instructor died. At that time, when he was but eighteen, it is safe to assume with Mantz that, notwithstanding his apprenticeship to the best available painter of the city, he was not much more than a novice. True, he had the opportunity of studying, on the high altar of the abbey-church of St. Amand, near Valenciennes, a great triptych of Rubens, with *The Stoning of St. Stephen* as its centre, and on the wings, *The Saint Preaching* and *The Burial of the Saint*. The contemplation of this important work may well have been the initial step in the study and imitation of the great Antwerp master, which only afterwards in Paris attained its full development under the influence of the Luxembourg pictures and the Crozat pictures and drawings. In Valenciennes itself the young student could, if he would, make acquaintance with Martin de Vos, Van Dyck, Janssens, and Crayer. But more than all these—more even than Rubens at this particular moment, when his steps still faltered and his path was uncertain—Teniers must have been his model; and we must assume, as we may very fairly do, that works of the prolific Flemish virtuoso, whose life was prolonged until 1690, must have come under his notice—nay, more, must have been closely studied by him.

Probably his first painting in order of date, among those of which a trace remains to us, is *La vraie Gaîté*¹ (formerly in the collection of Le Hardy de Famars, of Valenciennes, and by him engraved). This echoes, in almost servile fashion, Teniers and Brauwer, but chiefly the former. A couple of peasants of the approved gross Flemish type are seen dancing, while another makes music, and courting of the usual enterprising kind goes on in the background. Watteau, as we know him later on, peeps out in the peculiar small folds of the costumes, and in the heads of the women, which are redeemed by a certain latent coquetry from the unabashed brutishness which we associate with Teniers, Brauwer, and the Van Ostade group. As analogous to this, Dohme cites a com-

Flanders, and cartoons for tapestries prepared by him (*Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1889, vol. i.).

¹ R. Dohme, *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, "Die Französische Schule des XVIIIten Jahrhunderts—I. Antoine Watteau."

position of many figures, *Retour de Guingette* (engraved by P. Chedel), of which the subject in its *terre-à-terre* realism is also ultra-Flemish. It is closing-time at the ale-houses of Valenciennes, or some adjacent place, and numerous couples and groups, finely and humorously observed, are stumbling their way homeward, mutually supported, or mutually dragged earthwards. Here, however, the art, though Flemish, is much more advanced, and appears to the writer to suggest the subsequent period to which belong the numerous military subjects of small dimensions presently to be enumerated. To the early time, though perhaps not necessarily to the first Valenciennes period, belong also *La Marmotte* (engraved by B. Audran) and *La Fileuse* (engraved by the same), of which the former is in the gallery of the Hermitage at St. Petersburg, and the latter is not now known to exist.¹ This painting of single figures in pairs or series is again very suggestive of Teniers, and the characterisation is still Netherlandish, although more personal and less imitative than in *La vraie Gaïeté*.

Watteau left Valenciennes for Paris in 1702 on the death of Gérin, and we know nothing definite about the circumstances of his departure otherwise than from the vague expressions of Caylus, and the statement of Gersaint that "he left the paternal roof without any supply of money or clothing, in order to take refuge with some painter in Paris, and thus place himself in a position to make some progress." Mantz bids us discard the picturesque legend which shows us young Antoine leaving Valenciennes for Paris with a decorative painter of the city, who immediately obtains for him work in connection with the scenery and costumes of the opera, thus laying the foundation of the future Watteau style, with its idealisation of stage poetry and artifice, and bringing about close personal relations between the young provincial and the liberal divinities of the *corps de ballet*. Gersaint states, presumably on Watteau's own authority, that "chance caused him to light upon a mediocre painter, Métayer, whom he soon left owing to lack of work." Next—Caylus and Gersaint here agreeing—we find Antoine taking refuge with a manufacturer of pictures *à la douzaine*, and obtaining for his week's mechanical drudgery only three livres and his soup every day. Here every pupil had his speciality: one did

¹ Finished designs for both pictures, after drawings by Watteau, are in the *Figures de Différents Caractères*, published by Julienne.

the skies, another the heads, another the draperies, and yet another put in the high-lights and added the finishing touches to the picture. Watteau must soon have been promoted to work somewhat superior to this, since we find him repeating *ad nauseam* a certain *St. Nicolas* much in demand, which was specially reserved for him. As he said one day to Gersaint: "*Je sçavois mon saint Nicolas par cœur et je me passois d'original.*" He also repeated a well-known *Liseuse*, a spectacled old woman, by Gerard Dou (now at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg), the popularity of which in France during the eighteenth century is further attested by engravings from more than one practised burin, specimens of which are even now commonly to be found in the second-hand print shops.

We are on firmer ground when we come to Watteau's relations with Claude Gillot. Here at last is an artist of whom we know something, and something which proves that his influence operated to give a great impetus to the nascent art of Watteau, though his individuality was not sufficiently strong to leave upon it a permanent impress. The catalogue of the Louvre is silent as to Gillot, and no picture of his appears, indeed, to have come down to us, or at any rate to have been identified as his.¹ Still, this painter, who was eleven years Watteau's senior and already a prominent artist at the time when a happy chance threw the two together, made no inconsiderable figure in the art of the time. He became afterwards (in 1715) a member of the Academy, and survived his former *protégé* by a single year.

If we have no sufficiently authenticated paintings by Gillot, we have engravings after his strange *Bacchanales* and *Diableries* showing imaginativeness of a passionate and sensuous type, not common in the day of the Coypels, the Boullognes, the Jouvenets, when Rigaud and Largillière reigned supreme as portrait-painters, and when alone Santerre and the Swiss painter Alexis Grimou ventured upon certain mild innovations—in costume and the treatment of light rather than in the mode of conception.

¹ Dohme suggests that the two famous series of decorations, *La grande Singerie* and *La petite Singerie* at the château of Chantilly, are not by Watteau, to whom they are in some eloquent pages of the *Catalogue raisonné* ascribed by M. Edmond de Goncourt, but by Gillot. This is, according to the German critic, the opinion of the Duc d'Aumâle himself. In support of this argument Dohme adduces the fact that the fashion of the dresses worn by the monkey-men is that of about 1700, *i.e.*, a few years before the time when Watteau practised as a decorator.

As an *ornemaniste* Gillot showed a real originality, and it is here that he exercised over Watteau a real influence. Belonging to the school of Bérain, who, in the special branches of pure ornamentation and stage costume still reigned triumphant—ending with consummate decorative ability, though with the conventionality which belongs to his school, the Louis-Quatorzian period, and heralding that of the Regency—Gillot nevertheless gave the rein to his fancy, and ventured upon developments of his own constituting a renewal of the style. Bérain himself had already on occasion replaced the divinities of Olympus by the quaint types of the Italian and French comedy, and Gillot, further working this vein, introduced them not only into his decorations but into his easel pictures.¹ It can hardly be doubted that from him—and not, as legend has it, from the stage itself—Watteau obtained his first peep into the strange border-country of Italian comedy—too near reality in its strong synthetic representation of human passion and human vice to be a veritable dreamland, and yet too ideal, too much the realm of vision and fantasy, to be solid *terra firma*.

During these early years Watteau could, indeed, have had no opportunity of studying the Italian comedy, otherwise than through the works of his new preceptor and friend. In 1797, when he was a boy of thirteen living at Valenciennes, the unfortunate comedians were by order of Louis Quatorze bundled into the street, official seals being placed upon the doors of the theatre, and themselves expelled not only from the city but the kingdom. The cause was a play with an unfortunate title, *La fausse Prude*, which excited the anger and alarm of the *Grand Monarque*, who chose to assume, rightly or wrongly, that his morganatic spouse, Madame de Maintenon, was aimed at. This catastrophe extinguished for nineteen years, so far as France was concerned, the gaiety of “Harlequin curved with the mannered grace of a Parmegiano, Pierrot with his arms close to his side, as straight as an I, the Tartaglias, the Scapins, the Cassanders, the Doctors, and the favourite Mezzetin . . . always to the fore, his cup pushed from his brow, striped from head to heel, haughty as a god, fat as Silenus.” The well-known

¹ The British Museum can show no purely ornamental work by Gillot, but in that of Berlin (Section of Prints and Drawings) is a large portfolio containing designs of this class, which give a very high idea of his ability on his own ground.

subject attributed to Watteau, *Le Départ des Comédiens italiens* (engraved by L. Jacob) showing the lamentable discomfiture of the expelled mummeters, could not well have been painted by him before 1716, when the Regent, bent upon putting an end to the moral severities of the Maintenon régime, soon after the death of the aged monarch recalled them. Unless indeed the thing was done without models from types noted in the pictures and decorations of Gillot, which is not impossible, considering the stiffness and bad action of the figures intended to express passion and agitation. For there is no denying the fact that the composition is a failure.¹ But then Watteau is rarely if ever dramatic in the stricter sense of the word. He can wrap his personages round with an indefinable unity of sentiment, as he can wrap them round with an atmosphere of sunset haze or of dying day; but he cannot connect them with that invisible wire which makes all the personages of the dramatic painter at the given moment of representation thrill together, whether with the attraction of sympathy or the clash of opposing passion. The most dramatic composition of the master—indeed the only true dramatic one which the writer can call to mind—is that delightful painted satire *Le Chat malade* (engraved by J. M. Liotard).

To the friendship which a similarity of tastes, of character and disposition had created between master and pupil succeeded disagreement, and according to Caylus, they parted on bad terms, all the gratitude that Watteau showed to his former master and friend being to preserve an absolute silence with regard to their difference, while according all the same full praise to his works, and acknowledging his indebtedness to them. However this may be, and whether we choose to follow Caylus in his statement that master and pupil remained thenceforward entirely apart or not, we have evidence that Gillot at any rate showed no rancour, since we find him, remiss as he was in his attendances at the Academy, making an appearance on the occasion of Watteau's admission as a probationary member in 1712, and voting in his favour.

¹ Dohme has suggested, without furnishing any direct proof, that the *Départ des Comédiens italiens* is not by Watteau, but by Gillot himself. The point is the more difficult to decide, because we have only the evidence of the rather second-rate engraving, the picture itself having long since vanished. It is to be noted that the ladies who witness the expulsion from the windows, still appear in the *fontange* headdress, which was no longer worn in 1716, when the Comédie returned.

Another and later instance of disagreement with a *confrère*—but this time with an imitator—is afforded by his relations with Lancret, who was, as he himself had been, a student in the atelier of Gillot, but further developed himself by the example and at first also under the advice of Watteau. If we are to trust to the story related in the catalogue of the Louvre (1883), Lancret, profiting by the counsels of his senior, exhibited, as the custom then was, at the Place Dauphine, during the octave of the Fête-Dieu, two compositions in the style of Watteau so successful that they were attributed to the latter, and he even received in respect of them the compliments of some of his friends. This success, we are told, extinguished for ever the friendship of the two painters. A better authenticated story is that of the abrupt dismissal by Watteau of his pupil and fellow-countryman Jean-Baptiste Pater, for which, as will be seen later on, he made the noblest amends in his last days.

On his rupture with Gillot, Watteau had of necessity to seek a new master and a new home, and he found both with Claude Audran, the concierge of the Luxembourg, that is the keeper, in the higher and more important sense, of the sumptuous palace of Marie de Médicis, with its priceless contents. Audran was one of the first decorators of the day, and the rival in the estimation of his contemporaries of Jean Bérain himself. His most important works in the so-called *grotesque* style were to be found in the mansion of the Duchesse de Bouillon, in the Châteaux of Meudon and La Muette, and the Ménagerie of Versailles.

Though Watteau's extensive practice under such an acknowledged master of decoration as was Audran must have developed his facility and enlarged his style, it is not possible to admit without qualification the statement of Caylus that it was at this stage that his taste for ornament was formed. We have seen how his style in decoration was in the first place based on the agreeably fantastic manner of Gillot. It appears that Audran employed Watteau chiefly to paint the figures which he introduced into his schemes of decoration, but the probability is¹ that his collaboration was not thus restricted, but was extended to the fanciful coloured arabesques executed on a ground of white or gold.

Though Watteau's practice in the domain of pure decoration was clearly not limited to the time of his collaboration with Audran, and

¹ Mantz, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1889, vol. i.

very probably extended through a considerable portion of his short career, it may be convenient to discuss here this branch of his art, and to show in what it innovated upon the school of ornamentation—at once more constructive and logical and more sumptuous, if heavier and less *spirituel*—which marked the end of the seventeenth century and is chiefly associated with the name of Bérain.

Though it is by the influence of Audran, and the collaboration with him that Watteau's proficiency as a decorator and his development of what is practically a new style are generally accounted for, it is rather, as has already been hinted, to the prior influence of Gillot that should be ascribed the element of innovation introduced by the pupil, seeing that Audran himself was—as Mantz points out—very Louis-Quatorzian in style and associations. This innovation upon the more learned and complete methods of the seventeenth century at its close consisted mainly in the introduction not only of figures and groups much nearer to an ungeneralised realism than any that had previously appeared in the same connection but of quite naturalistic branches and foliage, birds and animals, connected with, yet not truly an integral part of, the ornamentation proper, which is itself of a transitional type, leading from the late Louis Quatorze to the Regency style—really the prefatory period of the so-called Louis Quinze.

Carried out with the spirited brush and the delicacy of colour proper to Watteau himself these compositions may well have possessed, we must, indeed, infer that they did possess, a charm not easily resistible. Translated into black and white as they appear to us in the very numerous reproductions of the *Recueil* published by Julienne, they cannot, even though they are Watteau's, command unstinted admiration. This direct juxtaposition, in one scheme of decoration, of elements taken straight from nature with others conventionalised and generalised according to rule—the one coalescing with the other no more completely than oil does with water—though it calls up the recollection of a still more illustrious example—that of Raphael himself in those over-praised decorations, the Loggie of the Vatican—is not to be justified, though it may be excused. Still, criticise as we may and must when we meet Watteau on this ground, it is not easy to resist the fascination of some of the best examples preserved to us in the engraved reproductions, such as, for instance, the popular *Dénicheur de Moineaux* (engraved by Boucher), the

Berger content (engraved by Crépy fils), or *Le Buveur* (engraved by Aveline).

If we put aside the *Grande Singerie* and *Petite Singerie* of Chantilly, not as wanting in vivacious charm and appropriateness, but as doubtful Watteaus, there remains little or nothing of this class that can with any



Watteau inv et fecit

Study of Costume, by Watteau. From the "Figures de Modes."

degree of certainty be ascribed to his own hand. Mantz mentions dubitatively some examples which have appeared from time to time in Parisian sales, chiefly models on a small scale, such as the *Dénicheur de moineaux*, already mentioned, and the unpleasing design *L'Alliance de la Musique et de la Comédie*, which was seen as lately as 1856. The



"Le Dénicheur de Moineaux," by Watteau. From the engraving by Boucher.

painted screens, the harpsichord decorations, the fans—for there were such—have disappeared, and irrevocably, it is to be feared; but the



Nikou, femme bonze. Engraved by Boucher from the decoration by Watteau in the Château de la Muette.

designs for some of the screens are preserved in the reproductions of the engravers. Well-authenticated productions of Watteau's own brush, and executed by him somewhere near the Audran period, were the pseudo-

Chinese decorations of the Château de la Muette, near Paris, of which all trace had disappeared long before the Revolution. The chief figures are fortunately preserved to us in the series engraved by Boucher under the title, *Diverses Figures chinoises peintes par Watteau, tirées du Cabinet de*



"Poisson en habit de paysan," by Watteau. From the "Figures Françaises et Comiques."

Sa Majesté au Château de la Meute (sic), and in the supplementary series by Jeaurat and Aubert respectively. Because in a superb drawing in the collection of the Albertina at Vienna (done in black lead on a tinted ground, and heightened in the lights with white) Watteau has delineated

with a fine observance of ethnic type a true Chinese, and even given his name "F. Sao," he has been complimented on his close study of the Chinese physiognomy in the decorations of *La Mulette*. These, as we know them in the engravings, are, on the contrary, for the most part—whether consciously or unconsciously—delightfully and humorously French. Of this assertion no better corroboration could be desired than the delicious *Nikou, femme bonze*, here reproduced after Boucher's engraving; the figure has a piquant charm, which notwithstanding the more or less Chinese get-up, is not Pekinese, but wholly Parisian of the eighteenth century. All these personages, notwithstanding the solemn jargon tacked on to them by the engravers, belong, indeed, to the realms of comedy, not as avowedly as the *Comédie italienne* and *Comédie française* episodes more closely associated with the master, yet hardly less certainly.

CHAPTER II

"Oui, au fond de cet Œuvre de Watteau, je ne sais quelle lente et vague harmonie murmure derrière les paroles rieuses; je ne sais quelle tristesse musicale et doucement contagieuse est répandue dans ces fêtes galantes."

EDMOND ET JULES DE GONCOURT.

WATTEAU now, as the pupil and collaborator of Audran, the Keeper of the Luxembourg, came definitively face to face with Rubens, whom, as we have seen, he had already had opportunities of studying at home in his boyhood at Valenciennes, yet not with so sustained an attention as he was now able to devote to the master akin to him in race, whose technique was at the root of his own throughout his career, yet whose artistic temperament in its robust sanity and lack not of passion but of the higher imaginativeness, had so little in common with that of the ultra-sensitive poet-painter, whose home was in the Flemish Valenciennes, but whose heart and genius belonged to France.

The great series of canvases now in the Louvre, in which are depicted with all sorts of mythological and symbolical adjuncts, episodes from the lives of Henri IV. and Marie de Médicis, were thus without restraint open to young Watteau. And yet he must have had other and more favourable opportunities of studying the *chef d'école* of Antwerp than in this vast succession of heavy Flemish allegories, of which the original sketches scattered now through the museums and collections of Europe, show the magic of Rubens's own brush, while the gigantic works developed from them are almost entirely the handiwork of his pupils. Not from these alone could Audran's pupil and guest have obtained that profound knowledge of Rubens's technique in its essence which he displayed later on when he exchanged the almost monochromatic *ton vigoureux* of his beginnings for the *ton fleuri* of his mature style. The Crozat Collection to which, as will be seen, he presently obtained access afforded him, with its 316 drawings by the Flemish master,

unlimited opportunities for developing his method and style as a draughtsman; and to canvases in the same collection and in that of Louis XIV. himself he must have owed that intimate comprehension of his fellow-countryman's technical methods which he could hardly have obtained from the Luxembourg pictures alone.

It was not, however, at this moment, when he was about to paint his first thoroughly individual piece, the *Départ de Troupe*, that he had fathomed all the secrets of the master's palette—the rosy freshness and brilliancy of the flesh-tints, the crisp folds of the satins with their sharp high-lights in solid impasto, the warm glow of the gracious landscapes, with their melting blue distances half wrapped in transparent vapour.

Mantz, relying on the now published archives of the Academy, was able to state for the first time with certainty the facts connected with the passage of Watteau through the schools. In its minutes of the 6th of April, 1709, we find that after an inspection of time-sketches, the Academy admitted Watteau, together with four other painters, Hutin, Vernansal l'aîné, Grison, and Parrocel, to compete for the *grands prix*. The subjects belonged to the class of those icily conventional ones which had imposed themselves ever since the so-called "great art" of France had become a branch of the later schools of Italy, and of the Bolognese in particular. The choice fell this time upon *The Return of David after the Victory over Goliath*, and *Abigail Bringing Food to David*, two themes which, if they came naturally enough to the average student of the schools, must have paralysed the inspiration of young Antoine, unfamiliar as he was with the academic standpoint, and drawn on the one hand towards a tempered form of the realism natural to his race, on the other towards the facile graces of the decorative style now flowering anew. After a public exhibition of the students' performances, the voting of the Academicians took place, and the second prize only was attributed to Watteau, the first being given to Grison, of whom the world knows nothing more than this. We need not overmuch lament over the disappearance of these first-fruits of contact with the Academy, although Julienne, the most amiable and euphemistic of our painter's friends, declares that Watteau's picture showed the sparks of that genius which subsequently blazed up into so fair a flame.

All these attendances at the schools, this severe labour of the competition, must have been squeezed out of Antoine's spare time, for during this period he had not ceased to work at the Luxembourg with his master-decorator Audran. Throughout this residence in the stately palace he must have enjoyed in the fair garden of the royal palace moments of solitude and contemplation, infinitely sweet and soothing to a temperament such as his. He wanted even in those early days the buoyancy which comes from perfect physical health and balance, but was maturing unconsciously the qualities, far more precious in their rarity, of poetic insight and an exquisite sensitiveness to the essential beauty of things commonplace and frivolous to the commonplace, who with an indifferent eye take in their surface only. The beautiful glades and avenues were then a little neglected, and Caylus describes them in charming phrase as "*moins peignées que ceux des autres maisons royales.*" It is here that Watteau unceasingly drew the trees, and drank in the beauty of prospects recalling the backgrounds of his worshipped Rubens. The happily imagined rusticated architecture of the palace, containing in this particular a reminiscence of those much earlier ones of the Florence whence Marie de Médicis came, and more particularly the rich beauty of the monumental colonnades and fountains supplied to him, as they had already done to Rubens, many a splendid motive. This is particularly clear in the *Jardin d'Amour* of the Antwerp master, and in such pictures presently to be discussed as Watteau's *Plaisirs du Bal*, *L'Amour au Théâtre français*, and many others of the same type.

Not only the trees of the royal garden, but the personages who walked in it, wearing for the benefit of the onlookers their freshest and daintiest apparel, occupied our painter. To him, whose pencil intuitively seized upon every significant movement, who revelled in the graces of womanhood, in the naive joys of happy childhood, there must have occurred here unrivalled opportunities for observing and taking notes, and that from his point of vantage he made full use of these opportunities there is every reason to believe.

It is about this time that must be placed the little work which, if not, as it has been called, Antoine's first picture, is at any rate the first in which his individuality asserted itself with decision above the influences of the early Flemish time. This is the spirited little *Départ*

de Troupe, engraved afterwards by Thomassin, completing the etching done by Watteau himself, as *Recrue allant joindre le Régiment*. According to Gersaint, Watteau took this little piece, done in his spare moments, to his master Audran. He was astonished and affrighted at the merit shown in this first distinctive production of the true Watteau, and, fearing to lose assistance so valuable to him in his art, counselled his too brilliant pupil to abandon this free and fantastic genre which could only impair the correct taste that he was then acquiring. Without imputing to Claude Audran any Macchiavellian wickedness in the matter, we may assume that he did what he could to keep by his side so valuable a talent, and thought to succeed by discouraging further excursions into a domain of art in which his pupil revealed such unexpected brilliancy.

The gifted assistant, feeling his feet now for the first time, had determined, however, on departure, and experiencing some mild home-sickness and a desire to see his parents again after a seven years' absence, he found in this natural longing of his a very decent excuse for getting away without a formal breach with his kind employer and friend. On this point Caylus and Gersaint practically agree, though the former is grandiloquent, the latter homely and unvarnished. But the sinews of war were not at hand, and the little *Départ de Troupe* being the young painter's only resource, he bethought himself of his Flemish friend Spoede, and took it to him. A happy chance led the intermediary to the dealer Sirois, who was to become the *gros brun au visage riant* of Watteau's picture and the father-in-law of Gersaint. The bargain was promptly completed, and the young painter, rejoicing in the possession of sixty livres, the modest price of the picture, departed gaily, says Gersaint, for Valenciennes. Somehow even in those early days, however, one cannot quite imagine in Watteau himself that frank, unrestrained gaiety which he knew so well how to impart to some of his comedy characters. In the bargain with Sirois he was evidently of opinion that he had nothing to complain of, since it was the foundation of the lifelong relations of business and friendship which were maintained between the two men.

Sirois, with the true instinct of the connoisseur-dealer, scented a future reputation, and pressed Watteau much to paint for him another picture as a pendant. This the young painter did while at Valenciennes,

producing this time the *Halte d'Armée* (engraved by C. N. Cochin). The altered relation between the parties is well shown by the fact that this time Watteau asked and obtained for his little piece 200 livres.

In connection with these two pictures there has existed, and indeed still exists, considerable confusion in the accounts of the biographers. Mantz, misled perhaps by Gersaint's statement that the *Départ de Troupe* was engraved by C. N. Cochin, whereas the *Halte d'Armée* only is so engraved, appears to look upon that picture and the *Recrue allant joindre le Régiment* as two distinct works. Surely, however, these are only two names for one and the same picture, the former being that given by Gersaint in his account, the latter the one borne by the engraving begun by Watteau and terminated by Thomassin. The two pieces are supposed to have been painted on copper, though Gersaint does not state that this was so ; and as such are mentioned by M. E. de Goncourt. Writing in 1875, he says, moreover, that the original of the *Recrue* (on wood) existed in a much damaged and darkened condition in the possession of a M. A. Sichel. Is this the same picture which Dohme, writing in 1883, enthusiastically describes as the original of the *Recrue* in the collection of M. Edmond de Rothschild at Paris? If so, the picture must in the interval have been restored so as to regain much of its pristine charm ; for he—one of the subtlest and most accurate judges of French eighteenth-century art and of Watteau in particular—deems it worthy of the closest analysis as showing the style of his favourite master in its beginnings. The colour, it appears, is grayish-brown and almost monochromatic like that of most of the artist's quite early works, yet not without its own peculiar effectiveness. The print of Thomassin shows the infinite spirit and truth of the design, with its onward march of soldiers headed by a mounted officer. The truth of movement in this last figure, seen from the back, might have made Meissonier envious : Watteau himself has not surpassed it.

Very inferior in interest, though foreshadowing both in figures and landscape some of the painter's most characteristic peculiarities, is the corresponding *Halte d'Armée*.¹

The Corporation Galleries of Art of Glasgow possess versions, nearly as large again as the originals, and painted on *canvas*, of the *Recrue* and the *Halte d'Armée*, the latter of which is by an error of the catalogue identified with the *Escorte d'Equipages* (engraved by Laurent Cars). These pictures which are in bad condition, if not by Watteau, are at

We must take the *Départ de Troupe*, which was the starting point of the military series, to be a recollection of the early Valenciennes days, since it was painted in Paris before the return thither. Watteau's recollection might well be revived by the sight of the troops which he must have seen marching and countermarching in Paris and its environs. Arriving in Valenciennes about the time of Malplaquet, he had only too ample opportunities for pursuing his studies in military genre, and we know indeed from Julienne that he executed there "several pictures, including studies of camps and soldiers drawn direct from nature." On the other hand, as the candid friend Caylus expressly underlines the fact that restless Watteau, finding after a time no more satisfaction in Valenciennes than elsewhere, made but a short stay, we must assume that the greater number of the military pieces which followed were taken from motives found and studied at home, but worked up in Paris.

The *Escorte d'Equipages* (engraved by Le Cars) described by Mariette as "*merveilleux*," is now no longer known to exist. In certain traits of naïve realism the picture is still Flemish; but in its charming sprightliness, modifying yet not mis-stating the elements of the scene, it is far already from the brilliant yet unimaginative productions of Flanders. Judging from the engravings, the almost miniature *Fatigues de la Guerre* and *Délassements de la Guerre*—the former engraved by Scotin, the latter by Crépy fils—have a still more piquant incisiveness, a still higher pictorial charm. Meissonier-like is the realistic truth, within the smallest space of each figure, but not Meissonier-like the spontaneous ease of the whole, or the amiable vivacity of the impression conveyed. These little jewels, according to the catalogue of the Hermitage, form part of the Imperial Collection there.¹ According to Mantz they have the monochromatic brown-grey tone which distin-

any rate of his time, and as such they confirm the hypothesis that the *Recrue* and the *Halte d'Armée* belong together, and that the former is identical with the *Départ de Troupe*. The two originals are supposed to have found a place shortly after they had been acquired by Sirois in the gallery of Crozat. These last are in Hébert's *Dictionnaire pittoresque* described as a *Marche de Troupe* and a *Halte*—yet another confirmation of the above hypothesis. There are in Julienne's *Recueil* "*Figures de différents Caractères*" several single studies, after drawings by Watteau, for figures of soldiers in the *Recrue*.

¹ M. de Goncourt has called the identity of these pictures at the Hermitage into question, suggesting, on not very convincing grounds, that they may be the *Recrue* and the *Halte d'Armée*. Unluckily they have not been photographed.

guishes the *Recrue* at Baron E. de Rothschild's, and they would thus belong to much the same period. It was of the pictures painted for Sirois that Gersaint wrote that they had "a vigour of colour and a harmony which made them seem to be by some old master." The *Retour de Campagne* (C. N. Cochin) is more elaborate than the preceding, but, on the whole, not so successful, though the consentaneous onward movement of a number of human beings is wonderfully given. Later and broader in style, if one may trust to J. Moyreau's engravings, but not as well composed, as vivid, or as manifestly based on reality, are another pair of pictures, a *Halte* and a *Défilé* (*sic*). Mantz, who possessed a reduced copy of the latter, describes it as in a monotonous brownish tone. A little *Encampment*, by Watteau, of this type, was in the collection of the late Miss James, and appeared as No. 47 at the Old Masters in 1891.

A glance at the engravings of all these fascinating little pieces shows at once the unity of Watteau's point of view. He does not see the tragic horror of war as Callot did long before him and Goya long afterwards; he does not see its official pomp and dignity like Van der Meulen; he is not conventional or unconvincing in his picturesqueness as Philips Wouverman and his fellows too often were. He is chiefly impressed by the buoyant movement, the vivacity, the sparkle of the whole; by the martial elegance of the uniforms, the *crânerie* with which they are worn, the amusing groups of soldiers disporting themselves with the usual donzels of the camp, of homelier women carrying or tending their children, of tents and impedimenta of all kinds in inextricable confusion. He sees that face of the truth which appeals to him, leaving in shadow those other faces which his nature renders him incapable of interpreting. Hardly ever, except when treating a subject having in it an element of the serio-comic and the caricatural, does Watteau attempt the representation of the deeper, the more tragic moments through which humanity passes.¹ He shuns all that is not gilded with the sunlight of a smile, or touched with the prismatic hue of an ephemeral exquisiteness; and it is this that causes Caylus to say

¹ As exceptions, nevertheless, must be mentioned two military subjects, *La Revanche des Paysans* (engraved by Baron), and *Pillement d'un Village par l'Ennemi* (engraved by same). These are, however, curiously cold and passionless in conception for subjects of this class.



Watteau pinxit

Crépy sculpsit

Les Délassements de la Guerre, by Watteau. From the engraving by Crépy fils.

with a literal truth that has in it nevertheless something misleading, that "il ne s'est jamais exposé à rendre aucune passion." There is no dramatic passion, rarely any very definitive or concentrated action in his conceptions, but the passion, the sentiment is of another kind. It is all-pervading, it is the man himself unconsciously shining through his works, however vivacious in outward aspect, however elusive of the serious side of life. But this point can better be dealt with in a general appreciation of the master and his art, and must wait until some of the facts of his career have been worked through.

It is not known at what exact moment he returned from Valenciennes, but Mariette states that after the journey to Flanders he took up his abode with Sirois, where he doubtless first met Gersaint, who was, or was soon to become, the husband of one of the picture-dealer's daughters. No event in Watteau's life, no particular work can be specially connected with the year 1711; but in 1712 he comes into contact with Crozat, an event of the first order in his career, since he thereby obtains the means of complete self-development by the closest and most loving contact with the drawings and paintings of the old masters accumulated at the residence of the financier, one of the most enthusiastic and accomplished collectors of his time.

He painted for the dining-room in Crozat's splendid mansion, which occupied the corner where the rue Richelieu, joined with what was then literally the outer boulevard of the city of Paris, four large oval compositions with the *Seasons*, of which we can now only judge by the engravings done by Desplaces, Renard du Bos, Fessard, and Audran respectively, and by the drawings for *Spring* and *Autumn* in the collection of M. E. de Goncourt. Caylus, treating these works *de haut en bas*, complains of their mannerism and dryness, and further states that they were carried out from the designs of the Academician La Fosse. Some dryness of execution there may still have been in comparison with the later and more brilliant style, but the drawing, the types, the modelling of the flesh, are easily recognisable, even in the engravings, as Watteau's own, and M. de Goncourt declares the studies for the *Spring* and *Autumn* in his collection to be in the most characteristic style of the master. Especially is this the case with the *Printemps* (engraved by Desplaces), a not altogether well-balanced composition in which Zephyr is seen crowning with roses a nearly nude



TWO STUDIES OF A MAN PLAYING ON THE GUITAR.

From the drawing by Watteau for "La Gamme d'Amour" (British Museum).

figure of Spring. Here the treatment of the torso and the drapery is the purest Watteau.

The exact moment at which the now rapidly developing painter actually took up his abode in Crozat's vast and splendid hôtel is not known, but that he was not in permanent residence there until after he had successfully passed the first stage of admission to the Academy on the 30th of July, 1712, in the manner presently to be told, is certain. Still it appears convenient to discuss now, on his first coming into contact with the Hôtel Crozat and its treasures, the paramount influence which at this stage the masters of Flanders and Venice had in his development, it being understood that our painter may not have made completely his own their secrets until some time after the date at which we have now arrived. In that day, when the royal galleries were not easily accessible, no school for the young artist comparable to this private collection could be imagined, and, luckily for Watteau, he approached its marvels at a moment when his technique was not fully developed, yet his artistic individuality had already so strongly asserted itself that it ran no risk of absolute absorption into that of the masters whom he so passionately admired and studied. The Crozat Collection at the death of its owner numbered four hundred paintings, and the almost incredible number of nineteen thousand drawings, upon which, it is said, as much as 450,000 francs had been spent. It cannot have been as vast in extent when Watteau was admitted to feast upon its wonders; but at any rate there was enough to provide material for study during a lifetime. The catalogue of Mariette,¹ drawn up in 1741, shows two distinct sets of twenty-three drawings each, attributed to Giorgione, examples of Palma Vecchio and Lorenzo Lotto, ninety-five drawings attributed to Titian, upwards of a hundred given to Paolo Veronese, many examples by Domenico Campagnola, Tintoretto, Jacopo Bassano and other Venetians of the golden time, no less than three hundred and sixteen drawings given to Rubens, and others too numerous for mention, for particulars of which those curious in the matter should consult the catalogue itself.

Once established in the princely residence of his patron, and able to

¹ Unfortunately the drawings are here lumped together in groups and series, and noted in such fashion that it is generally impossible to identify them by the text only.

study its contents at leisure, Watteau found himself face to face with the two great guiding influences of his life—Rubens, and the Venetians, through whom Rubens had been enabled to shake himself free of the earlier and more frigid Italianising influences undergone by Flemish art, and to develop untrammelled all the exuberant splendour of his style.

As a draughtsman—that is, in the branch of his technique in which he avowedly stands unsurpassed, even by the greatest masters of all time—Watteau is not less undoubtedly the artistic child of Rubens than as a painter. His incomparable method of drawing, whether in sanguine, in black chalk and sanguine, or *aux trois crayons*, is to be found in the germ, nay, even in a high state of development in the superb drawings due to the hand of the Antwerp master; the use of black and red chalks in the combinations in which the latter used them, and with the pictorial as well as lineal significance which was the result, must, indeed, be considered as especially characteristic of him. To go no further than the public exhibition of drawings in the new wing of the British Museum, let us compare the *Isabelle Brant*¹ of Rubens with the Watteau drawings in the Malcolm Collection and in that of the British Museum itself, and the parentage of the latter becomes at once manifest. And yet how absolutely, even in the drawing, is the difference between the one and the other temperament exhibited! How in the one case we feel at once under the spontaneity and independence, a kind of jubilant sanity and healthfulness, while the impression is unconsciously derived that the swift, the unerring, the incomparably suggestive pencil of Watteau expresses a temperament more than normally tender, sensitive, and febrile. As with the pictures, there is nothing in the subject of the drawings to reveal or to explain in any clearly explicable fashion what is here suggested; yet in this phase of his art, too, the man makes himself irresistibly yet indefinitely felt behind his simplest works.

What interests Watteau the draughtsman is swiftness, momentariness of movement and attitude, the strong physical sense of life, the definition of what is essential to the type or the defined group of individuals, rather than the expression of physical or mental individuality in the narrower sense. He loves to note down in infinite variety of motive, and of bodily,

¹ Probably a study for the portrait of the master's first wife at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg.



TWO STUDIES OF LADIES' HEADS.

From the drawing by Watteau in the British Museum.

as distinguished from physiognomic expression, woman rather than a particular woman ; the vanishing profile of the softly rounded young face ; the body elastic and vigorous within its prison of satin ; the sharp broken folds of the rich taffetas, both hiding and suggesting the



Study in Three Chalks, by Watteau. From the Collection in the British Museum.

form within ; the sinewy strength and lithe grace of early manhood ; the boy, wide-eyed and expectant, or the girl giving promise of the woman, with her budding, tender grace ; and again, the bright, worldly face of the abbé in all the unimpaired vigour of life, or the good-natured shrewdness of the professional comedian.

Watteau had already seen Rubens at St. Amand, and then again on

a vast scale, but with much dilution, at the Luxembourg. Now he must have come into contact with a Rubens of a more exquisite and restful type—the Rubens of the *Jardin d'Amour*, of the splendidly glowing Flemish landscapes into which some of the ardour and poetry of Titian had been infused. This picture, the *Jardin d'Amour*¹ (otherwise *La Société élégante*), is somehow at the root of Watteau's most typical *Fêtes galantes*, and yet it is not possible to go beyond the inference that he must have known and studied it. One original of the work is at Madrid, another and finer version, differing considerably from this last, in the collection of Baron Edmond de Rothschild at Paris. There is a remarkable copy of Baron Rothschild's picture in the Dresden Gallery, which, just because it is there, is better known than the original. Numerous other copies can be shown to exist, and either from an original or from one of these copies Lempereur's engraving must have been done in Paris in 1769 (Mariette, *Abecedario V.* 135). It is impossible to resist the conclusion that Watteau must have seen the composition either in an original, a copy, or an engraving.²

The essential conception of such pictures by the young master of Valenciennes as the great *Embarquement pour Cythère*, and some of the *Fêtes galantes* would appear to be traceable to this source. In the conception of Rubens, as in the later French pictures, sumptuous seventeenth-century architecture and fair trees frame the scene of delightful idleness. Rubens has a stone fountain with a nude female divinity and amorini, suggesting those in the *Embarquement*, yet how different! In the *Jardin d'Amour* the splendid Flemish seigneurs and dames are seen in amorous conversation, while Cupids, either balanced in mid-air, or insidiously creeping into the skirts of the fair ones, transfix them with their darts, and incite them to yet more passionate demonstrations. All this occurs again with more elaboration and an infinitely more poetic charm in Watteau's masterpiece, and yet it would be unfair to say that one line or one contour had in this instance been directly borrowed by the younger from the elder master. With Rubens we are in a secluded pleasure-ground, far from the hum of the city, yet very clearly on the everyday earth and in

¹ Max Rooses, *L'Œuvre de P. P. Rubens*, vol. iv.

² There is a coarse and exaggerated woodcut of the picture, hardly recognizable at first, by Jeghers.



Turkish Servant with Dish. From the drawing by Watteau in the British Museum.

the company of solid Flemings, fairly apparelled, and of high degree. Watteau lifts us just a little above the realities of the scene—not high enough to lose its warmth and humanity, but sufficiently to transport us into the poet's dreamland.

This brings us to the great *Kermesse* itself, that tremendous piece of Flemish realism in which Rubens goes beyond Jordaens himself both in passion and uncompromising literalness. This picture, which now belongs to the Louvre,¹ was in Watteau's time in the collection of Louis XIV., and we have absolute proof that he studied it in detail, and both drew and painted from it. It is curious that this particular work, in which Rubens has given the fullest rein to physical brutality, should have fascinated to such a degree our painter, who, even when he is nearest to the common earth and to the most material side of love, preserves his delicate fastidiousness intact. First, we have the sanguine drawing by Watteau, No. 297, in the His de la Salle section of the Louvre drawings, reproducing three groups from the *Kermesse*; then he copies in oils one of the groups, consisting of two women and a man dancing;² and lastly, we find in one of his own pictures, *La Surprise*³ (engraved by B. Audran), the most striking reminiscence of an episode in Rubens's great work. The picture itself, which was originally done for the painter's friend, Hénin, has vanished; it was described as one of his best performances. This is almost the only instance that the writer has met with in which Watteau has directly borrowed and adapted to his own uses a motive from another master, and it must be owned that he has not quite justified the borrowing. The violence of gesture and movement which so perfectly suited Rubens's gross peasants, less well becomes the softer dalliance of Watteau's dainty lovers. *L'Amour désarmé*, in the collection of the Duc d'Aumâle (engraved by B. Audran), can be traced back to Paolo Veronese, but this group of Venus and Cupid, like all Watteau's representations of the nude figure, preserves curiously the colour and sentiment of the eighteenth century.

The influence of Venice makes itself more subtly yet hardly less

¹ A double sheet of pen-and-ink sketches for many of the most animated groups in it is in the British Museum.

² Max Rooses, in *L'Œuvre de P. P. Rubens*, states that this copy by Watteau appeared in the Artaria sale (Vienna, 1886).

³ A feeble copy is in Buckingham Palace Collection.



A Beggar Woman with her Alms Box. From the drawing by Watteau in the British Museum.

unmistakably, felt than that of Flanders. Caylus tells us that our painter was particularly attracted by the landscape drawings of Titian and Domenico Campagnola, and that those of Jacopo Bassano also interested him. The biographer further relates that he and Hénin used to prepare for their teacher an "infinite number" of drawings after the best Flemish masters and the great Italian landscapists, and that when they were sufficiently advanced the master would give *quatre coups*, and obtain the right effect. Mantz has called into question this account as one of the dubious statements of the egotistic friend Caylus re-arranged for the benefit of the Academy; and, indeed, it seems likely that if such drawings were executed, they were done not for Watteau, or to pass as his, but as exercises for his pupils, to which he may have given some final corrections and finishing touches. There are several studies by him in the Louvre after Titian and Veronese, and among these Dohme points to the sanguine No. 1,342, after Titian, as perhaps a pupil's work finished in the fashion above indicated.

There is one marked peculiarity about Watteau the draughtsman, whether he copies nature or an old master. He draws evidently for the pleasure of drawing in the first place, though what he does often serves for future use in connection with his own work. From the old master he will take a group or a salient motive, and note it down with infinite gusto. From nature he will take the type, the movement that charms him, and though he may or may not utilise what he has got, he never deliberately sits down to prepare entire designs which shall serve as the groundwork for any even of his most crowded and important canvases. These are and remain, therefore, in a certain sense improvisations of the more deliberate order, in which pictorial notes and memoranda are worked up, but without any hard-and-fast plan controlling and shaping the work from the very beginning.¹ Of course among the drawings many motives and figures may be recognised which appear again in the paintings, but even then by no means invariably in the order in which they are first noted.

¹ Among the exceptions are the two drawings from the *Seasons* cited as in his own possession by M. de Goncourt. Reproductions are to be found in the *Figures de différents Caractères* of complete drawings for *La Marmotte*, *La Fileuse*, *La Finette*, and *L'Indifférent*. These being all single figures, even in the originals, may be taken as exceptions which prove the rule. M. de Goncourt possesses also in his collection some very spirited designs for purely decorative pieces which still survive in engravings.



"Sous un habit de Mezzétin," by Watteau. From the engraving by Thomassin fils.

Thus the drawing No. 251 in the Public Exhibition (Malcolm Collection) shows two studies of women's heads which reappear in the painting *Sous un Habit de Mezzetin*, but no longer juxtaposed. There is again a red chalk study in the British Museum (1891-7-13-2) of boys playing with a goat, in the style of Fiammingo (François Duquesnoy) which is utilised for the fountain in *La Cascade*, and also in *La Famille*.¹

In the *Figures de différents Caractères* are etchings after several drawings for figures in the picture *L'Occupation selon l'Âge* (engraved by Dupuis).² These instances are taken at random, and might be indefinitely multiplied. Still, the broad fact remains that Watteau drew, as a rule, for the sake of indulging in the pleasure of exercising his unrivalled facility and sensitiveness of eye and hand. Even he, so mistrustful of himself as a painter, so easily disgusted with his finished work, felt and gloried in his supremacy and magic charm as a draughtsman. We have it from Gersaint that he preferred his drawings, even to the most perfect among his pictures, that he took more pleasure in drawing than in painting, that he was furious with himself because he could not, or deemed that he could not, in painting perpetuate all the vivacious and truthful touches which with his pencil he so inimitably rendered.

When we come to consider more closely the position of Watteau the painter with regard to the Venetians with whom he for the first time came into contact in the Crozat Collection, we shall not find it possible to agree entirely with the statement of Mantz : "C'est-là qu'il apprit à peindre ces carnations chaudes et giorgionesques dont on ne se lasse pas d'admirer les colorations ambrées." Watteau commands the golden as well as the silver tone, his colour may often legitimately be described as *ambrée*, but it is so to the end rather with the glow of Rubens than with the golden effulgence of Giorgione and Titian. There is ever a foundation of grey in the half-tones even in the warmest flesh-tints, and they do not reveal the true Venetian mode, but, on the contrary, a more solid, compact impasto and a

¹ According to M. de Goncourt, this is, however, the copy or adaptation of a group by Sarrazin at Marly.

² Formerly in the collection of Miss James, and No. 50, at the "Old Masters" in 1891. In the same *Recueil* are several figures which re-appear in *Les Plaisirs du Bal* at Dulwich. Another striking drawing there reproduced is that of the negro boy lifting a bottle from a wine-cooler, to be found in the *Music Party*, engraved as *Les Charmes de la Vie*.



TWO GIRLS' HEADS FOR "SOUS UN HABIT DE MEZZETIN."

From the drawing by Watteau in the Malcolm Collection (British Museum).

brilliancy of another order. This is the case even with Watteau's most Titianesque performance, the *Jupiter et Antiope* in the La Caze section of the Louvre. Here the master of Cadore has avowedly been the model; the scene, the subject, the warm sunset glow of the landscape enframing the figures are his, though the picture is not in the narrowest sense an imitation or an adaptation of Titian. Nevertheless, the actual flesh-painting with its rosy tints approaches, here as elsewhere, more nearly to Rubens than to the great Venetian; but it is, indeed, in its differences both from the one and the other master, Watteau's own. It is amusing to note how the sensuousness inseparable from the subject becomes here, notwithstanding the undisguised effort of the painter to Venetianise, a piquant eighteenth-century sensuousness of the boudoir, and no longer the voluptuousness, ennobled by its very candour and simplicity, of sixteenth-century Venice.

Technically, Watteau owes much more to Paolo Veronese than to the group of true Venetians who traced their artistic descent from Giorgione. Akin to the method of the Veronese master is that frank juxtaposition of bright, sparkling tints, fused into a general harmony not so much by a nice balance among themselves, as by the quieting influence of silvery whites and greys introduced in large masses both in the dresses and more particularly in the architecture. The result, as in Veronese, is on the one hand by the law of value to give a more jewel-like brilliancy to the various contrasting colours, on the other to prevent them from unduly dominating so as to destroy the unity of tone. Especially in the use made of the florid Barocco and Louis XIV. architecture in such pictures, for example, as the *Plaisirs du Bal* (at Dulwich), the *Music Party* (otherwise *Les Charmes de la Vie*), in the collection of Lady Wallace at Hertford House, and *L'Amour au Théâtre français* (Berlin) does the influence of Paolo Veronese make itself manifest.

What Watteau now learnt from Giorgione and his school was something quite different, and even more essential. We cannot be sure that he saw any genuine Giorgione, though the exquisite *Concert champêtre* of the Louvre—one of the finest and most typical of that master's few extant works—was in the collection of Louis XIV., and if he saw and studied the *Kermesse* of Rubens there—as we know for certain that he did—there is no reason why he should not have seen and studied the *Concert*. In the Crozat Collection were, as has been seen, large series of drawings

given to Giorgione, a still larger number set down to Titian, and many avowedly by the imitator of both, Domenico Campagnola, to whom, moreover, must have belonged a good many of those catalogued as by his betters. Even without the evidence of Caylus that Watteau was fascinated by the leafy landscapes of Titian and Campagnola, we could scarcely fail from a contemplation of his work to conclude that the Venetian idyll of the early sixteenth century had opened his eyes and left upon his art an indelible impression. Such pictures as the foolishly-named *Le Lorgneur* (engraved by G. Scotin), and *La Lorgneuse* (engraved by the same),¹ are indeed happy transpositions into the eighteenth century mood of the Giorgionesque idyll, as reflected in the Campagnola drawings of a class now so familiar under their right name. And another composition, too, *Le tête-à-tête* (engraved by B. Audran), is purely Giorgionesque in conception.

It is not only, or indeed, principally in such pieces as these, in which the wave of Venetian influence is obvious and on the surface, that Watteau shows a spirit akin to that of the pastoral poet-painter of Venice. Take as an instance, one of the most beautiful and typical inventions of our master, the *Amour paisible* in the Neues Palais of Potsdam (engraved in reverse by J. de Favannes). Here the scene is essentially Watteau's own, and the delicately tempered vivacity altogether that of the budding eighteenth century. It is as if the art of the time tearing itself from the iron grasp of the *Grand Siècle*, as Spring in Botticelli's *Primavera* slips from the icy arms of Winter, had regained freedom, had come nearer to light and life—to nature unbound from the trammels of a petrifying conventionality. The very composition is a happy improvisation owing nothing to academic calculation or balance—as supremely successful as some of Watteau's improvisations are in this respect the reverse. Yet here the French painter of *Fêtes galantes* shows himself even more clearly in spirit a younger brother of the Venetian, than when he is less completely himself and more avowedly influenced. Watteau is, indeed, the Giorgione of a more degenerate and artificial age, and it may be this coming into contact, mediately or immediately, with him that set free our master's wings and fixed once for all the direction of his flight.

¹ Here, as no doubt in the great majority of instances, we must blame not the master himself, but the printsellers laying hold of *ad captandum* titles, and enlivening their engraved reproductions by the flattest and most commonplace of verses.



L'Amour Paisible, by Watteau. From the picture in the Royal Collection at Potsdam.

It is not only the community of subject that connects the art of the more recent with that of the earlier artist. There is the same love of humanity and of nature, and yet the same aloofness from actuality, the same withdrawal from contact with the more obvious and commonplace aspects of the world. There is the same striving in both to perpetuate the one exquisite moment in life and in the enviring nature indefinitely responding to that life ; to express the more strongly its exquisiteness by emphasising its evanescence, the ephemeral character of its charm. We are not so much above the everyday world, in an atmosphere of ideality, as aside from it, in an oasis of calm and pause where passion is lulled but not quenched, where the joy in music, in love, in life for itself, momentarily shuts out the past and the future. Yet not so wholly, after all, as to banish a subtly penetrating sense of melancholy—of regret, as it were, that the joy should be so short-lived, the glowing light so near extinction, that the strong crude realities of life should be in hiding so near at hand. The shrinking in both the painter-poets from too close a contact with subjects compelling the portrayal of strong human passion is another point in common.

Both can render with unequalled charm and with a pathos which we must feel, but may not, without destroying it, define, the informing sentiment, the essential character of a scene—its transposition into the lyrical and subjective mood. Neither will attempt to render even in an idealised and simplified form its more obvious dramatic significance or its objective character.

Only Giorgione is consciously the *Penseroso*—his melancholy is compounded of strong sensuous longing and of the aspiration to express, not dramatically, but physiognomically, the tragic passion of youth, the soul in self-contemplation. Watteau, only half conscious perhaps of the tendency of his art, of the colour which it receives from his ultra-sensitive temperament, assumes the *Allegro*, will attack none but joyous subjects dealing with the idle moments of life. He does so in absolute good faith, and with no conscious desire to infuse into his pictures of amorous dalliance or innocent gaiety anything but the spirit naturally belonging to them. Yet beware lest he be taken too literally at his word ; for then we shall miss the very essence of his artistic personality, the very thing in which, apart from an infinite technical superiority, he differs from his pupils and imitators, as he does, indeed, from all other French artists of the brilliant, superficial time to which he belongs.

CHAPTER III

*Les donneurs de sérénades,
Et les belles écouteuses,
Échangent des propos fades
Sous les ramures chanteuses.*

VERLAINE.

MANTZ indulges in the very reasonable conjecture that it was under the influence of the veteran Charles de la Fosse, who since 1707 had inhabited the Hôtel Crozat and had there decorated a gallery with the *Birth of Minerva*, that Watteau determined in 1712 to solicit admission to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture.¹ It must be remembered that it was at the moment an absolute necessity for a painter practising on his own account to be enrolled in the ranks of the Academy, or alternatively to submit to the monopoly of the Corporation of St. Luke. On this particular point Gersaint, who must by this time have come into personal relations with our painter, might reasonably be supposed to be an authority. In his picturesque account he relates that Watteau conceived a great desire to go to Rome, to study there the great masters, and particularly the Venetians (!), whose colouring and composition excited his admiration. But being unable to undertake the journey at his own expense, he determined to solicit the grant of a pension from the king, and with this view caused the two little pictures painted for Sirois to be taken to the Academy. Starting without other friends or recommendation than his works, he had them placed in the saloon through which Messieurs de l'Académie were in the habit of passing,

¹ Mantz places as late as the end of 1715, or even in the beginning of 1716, the definitive occupation by Watteau of an apartment in the Hôtel Crozat. This would appear, however, to leave a very narrow margin of time for the full expansion of his art which was thereby undoubtedly brought about.

and they looking at them, were attracted, although unaware or careless who was the author. M. de la Fosse was even more attracted than the rest, and he took the trouble to make some inquiries at the Academy as to the painter. Obtaining the answer that the pictures were the work of a young man who had come to solicit the intercession of Messieurs de l'Académie, since he would obtain the king's pension and start travelling in Italy, M. de la Fosse, surprised, ordered the said young man to be introduced. Watteau appears; his figure is not imposing; he explains modestly the object of the step upon which he has ventured, and entreates that the favour asked may be accorded to him if he be deemed worthy. "My friend," replies with urbanity M. de la Fosse, "you are unaware of your own talent and distrustful of your powers. Believe me, you know more than we do, and we hold you capable of doing honour to the Academy. Take the formal steps: we consider you one of ourselves." Watteau thereupon retired—Gersaint laconically winds up—paid his visits, and was at once accepted. Mantz throws cold water upon this pretty story, and points out how glaringly improbable it is that La Fosse, in the presence of veterans like Jouvenet and Largillière, should have addressed young Watteau in such hyperbolical and altogether unofficial terms of praise; and the eminent French critic unkindly, yet not without some cause, concludes that honest Gersaint had *des aptitudes de journaliste*. On such a cardinal point as the taking to the Academy of Sirois's two pictures, one can hardly, all the same, make up one's mind without direct proof that Gersaint is altogether romancing, or is entirely misinformed. He may possibly, as Mantz suggests, be confusing or condensing two separate events. Mariette states that the pictures, or *one* of the pictures, upon which Watteau was accepted by the Academy was *Les Jaloux*¹ (engraved by G. Scotin), which, according to M. Edmond de Goncourt, was last heard of in 1786.

The fact remains that on the 30th of July, 1712, the Academy, having duly inspected the works presented by "*Antoine Watau, peintre*,

¹ Against this statement of Mariette's is the fact that *Les Jaloux* is one of the Comédie italienne series, and that it is thus unlikely that it should have been executed before the return of the Italian mummers in 1716. Variations of the same theme are the very similar *Pierrot content* (engraved by Jeaurat) with seven figures in lieu of five, and the less elaborate *Harlequin jaloux* (engraved by Chedel).

né à Valenciennes," pronounces by vote his admission. The subject of his diploma picture (*Ouvrage de Réception*) is left to his own choice, Coypel and Barrois being nominated to be present while he works. It is to be noted that by an exceptional favour the choice of the work upon which will depend the definitive admission of Watteau as a full Academician is left to him: as a rule it is prescribed at the time of the probationary admission, and moreover a sketch-design must be submitted before the work itself is undertaken. Our painter's master, the fantastic Gillot, had to submit, like others, to this rule.

Was it before or after the sojourn at Crozat's that is to be placed that period of instability and physical restlessness so graphically described by Caylus? Apparently before the definitive settling down in the magnificent hotel of the rue de Richelieu—and yet the words of the too candid friend apply equally well to both the earlier and the later periods, and perhaps even more aptly to the latter than the former.

We learn that he was no sooner established in a lodging than he took a dislike to it. He changed again and again, and always on some pretext which, out of very shame at his own inconstancy, he endeavoured to make as specious as possible. "He felt himself most at ease," says Caylus, "in rooms which I (from time to time) engaged in different quarters of Paris, and which were used only for designing from the model, painting, and drawing. In those retreats, entirely dedicated to art, he and I with a mutual friend (Hénin) enjoyed, in freedom from all importunity, the pure joy that youth, stimulated by the vivacity of the imagination can give, both gifts serving to enhance the charms of painting. I may say that Watteau, elsewhere so atrabilious, so timid, so caustic, was here in very truth the Watteau of his pictures; that is the personage whom they conjure up for us—agreeable, tender, and even a little Arcadian (*même un peu berger*)."¹ It must be owned that Caylus—a mediocre and pretentious judge of painting, although he

¹ It is not at present possible to fix with any degree of certainty the date when Watteau took as his apprentice his fellow-townsmen Jean-Baptiste Pater. The latter was born in 1696, so that when our painter returned to Valenciennes in 1709 he was only eleven years old. When his father, the sculptor, Antoine Pater (whose portrait by Watteau still exists in the museum of Valenciennes) sent him to Paris to study painting he could not well have been less than sixteen or seventeen, and we may safely place the beginning of the abortive apprenticeship after the preliminary acceptance of

dabbled himself in the art—was a keen if not a sympathetic judge of character. Though the lines of his portrait are here too deeply bitten, it is outlined with a rare skill, and even, in the last passage, with a rare charm. It coincides so perfectly with what Gersaint says, and also with what we must infer as to our painter's physical temperament, that there can remain but little doubt as to its substantial accuracy.

Here is Gersaint's portrait, which in a few sentences places the man even more vividly before us, though the true friend must have had a moment of retrospective exasperation when he drew it.

“Watteau was of medium height and of a weak constitution; his character was unrestful and changing; he was strong in will, not burdened by moral scruple, yet of virtuous conduct (*libertin d'esprit, mais sage de mœurs*). He was impatient, timid, cold and embarrassed in general intercourse, discreet and reserved with strangers, a good but an unmanageable friend. He was misanthropic, a bitter and incisive critic, always discontented with himself and others, and of unforgiving disposition. He loved reading, which was the only amusement that he allowed himself in his leisure, and, though without much instruction, he showed some sureness of judgment in appreciating the creations of the intellect.”

At about this time, or it may be a year or two later, should be placed the best portrait we have of the master by himself—the etching by Boucher after Watteau's own drawing, which appears in *Julienne's Figures de différents Caractères*. Here he is already the painter who has achieved success; his fur-trimmed coat, although for the time simple, is rich and costly; he wears the long, flowing, but not outrageous wig still in his day a necessary complement of full dress, and which is still worn by the fashionable personages in the *Enseigne de Gersaint* (1721). The wandering distrustful eye, the feverish, expressive hands, the face too drawn and marked for youth—all these bear out the picture of Watteau's physical temperament so firmly sketched by Caylus and Gersaint. In another portrait, of which only the engraving by Tardieu is now known

Watteau by the Academy—but at what exact date? The impatience and atrabilious humour of Watteau were the cause that the connection came to a premature end. We shall see that the master in his last moments made the most touching atonement for his harshness and injustice.



Watteau pinx.

Boucher Sculp.

Portrait of Watteau by himself. From the engraving by Boucher.

to exist, Watteau appears with his friend and patron M. de Julienne in a leafy landscape—the former painting, the latter playing on the violoncello.¹

MM. de Goncourt have even gone so far as to recognise his features in those of the musician who in *Le Lorgneur* charms the leisure of an amorous couple ; but if he be indeed there, it is only as the first model to hand. The brilliant historians of the art of the eighteenth century, stepping for once into what is too oblique and insecure a side-path of conjecture, would have us recognise here the poet-painter, looking on morose and *ennuyé*, at the doings of the gay, ephemeral creatures whom his fantasy has called into being.

Nothing is so hazardous as to attempt in the present state of our knowledge of Watteau a hard-and-fast classification of his works from technical considerations alone, although these must of course serve as our chief guide. With painters of this peculiar stamp, depending so much upon impulse, and the impression, the surrounding circumstances of the moment, there must be certain technical exceptions and experiments calculated to upset or confuse the most legitimate inferences. Dohme, like the valiant and accomplished German savant that he was, made the attempt, basing his classification mainly upon the examples in the collections of the Royal House of Prussia, and more particularly upon those shown in the Berlin Exhibition of Old Masters held in 1883—and he did so with a fair measure of success. Mantz, writing some years afterwards, declined the task, considering that the *Œuvre* of our master was so scattered through the museums of Europe, and the private collections of Germany, England, France, and Russia, that nothing more than approximative results could at present be achieved.

To a period when Watteau had not yet abandoned Gersaint's *ton vigoureux* for the more amiable *ton fleuri* belongs *Les Bergers* (Neues Palais, Potsdam), of which a smaller and riper example (engraved by Tardieu as *Le Plaisir pastoral*) is in the collection of the Duc d'Aumale at Chantilly. This constitutes in the treatment of the subject a transition between the *bergerie* and the ornate *fête galante* as the painter afterwards conceived it. Dohme has called attention to the want of ease in the drawing of certain figures, and the failure to hit off

¹ The original, a drawing in three chalks, was No. 776 in Julienne's sale.

the appropriate movement in a few of them. To this same period of transition preceding full maturity would appear to belong the picture *L'Heureuse Rencontre* in the collection of M. Marcel Bernstein (etched by M. Ad. Lalauze for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1890, vol. i.). Here again a want of flexibility is to be noted in the dainty figures, and there is a distinct failure to fix on the canvas that particular effect of momentariness in the advancing movement of the personages which has been aimed at, and is indeed essential to the subject.

The charming *L'Amour paisible* (engraved by J. de Favannes), upon which, as has been shown, the art of Venice, the spirit of Giorgione, has left its stamp, approaches somewhat in tone to the pieces of the transitional period. Yet the atmosphere of idyllic poetry in which it is enveloped, the mysterious charm of the vague melting distance, are so many arguments in favour of its being placed somewhat nearer to the first version of the *Embarquement pour Cythère*.¹ Before this last-named masterpiece (1717), which marks the culminating point of Watteau's technical achievement and the full expansion of his imaginative power, must, in the opinion of the writer, be placed a whole group of works containing a number of small figures, in which the colouring already has the richness, the vivacity, the happy daring in the juxtaposition of tints, which Watteau can only have learnt from a close contact with Rubens and the Venetians in the Crozat Collection, yet the treatment does not show in the fullest measure the piquancy, the elegance or the transforming poetry which marks those inventions of which the *Embarquement* is the loveliest and the most typical. At the fashionable concerts and routs of the Hôtel Crozat, and at the garden-parties which we may imagine to have been given in the grounds of the financier's ornate villa at Montmorency, Watteau, as the *protégé* of the house, came into contact with the world of fashion, and had ample opportunities for studying the gleam of light on satin, crimson, amber, blue, or white; the mannered grace, the voluptuous charm, tempered by a certain outward reticence, of the ladies, the nervous elegance, the finely-turned muscular limbs of the gallants, the rhythmic measure

¹ This *L'Amour paisible* is not to be confounded with the later work engraved under the same name by Baron, and of which it is assumed that it was painted during the artist's stay in England. It is the latter which was included in Dr. Mead's sale in 1754, with the *Comédiens italiens*, and there fetched £42.

of the dance. True, in the group of works now to be discussed the quasi-rustic element still has a large part; but it is a rusticity not like that which colours the earlier and more Flemish Watteaus, but one lightly worn by people more gently and artificially nurtured.

In the Museum of the Prado at Madrid (No. 2083, catalogue of 1882) is a picture representing the preparations for a marriage and bearing a sort of family resemblance to the *Accordée de Village*, of which according to M. E. de Goncourt it is the precursor.¹ There, as in this last-named piece, the young bride sits under a suspended canopy or coronal of white flowers. Madrid possesses another and an admirable Watteau (No. 2084 *ibid.*) catalogued as *View in the Gardens of St. Cloud with Fountains and a Thicket*.

Of the veritable *Accordée de Village* (engraved by N. de Lar-messin) there are no less than three examples extant, all three of them, in the opinion of the writer, originals. These differ slightly the one from the other in dimensions, and also in the arrangement of the landscape background; but no photographic reproductions being available for the purposes of comparison, it is difficult to say from which particular example Larmessin engraved, or what are the exact differences which are to be noted in the grouping of the figures. There is nothing that need alarm us in the fact that three originals exist from the hand of the master closely resembling each other in treatment. Take, first, the typical instance of *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*, of which the prior example is in the Louvre, the later and much more elaborate one in the Royal Palace at Berlin. Watteau, indeed, reproduces yet again one of the main episodes of his *magnum opus* in the *Bon Voyage*—unless we are to assume that we have here the first idea, the bud from which the full blossom was afterwards matured. Then there is the instance of *L'Amour pastoral*, already cited, of which one version is at Berlin, the other at Chantilly. And again the *Music Lesson* in the Hertford House Collection has for its companions the much larger canvas (also there) called *The Music Party*, and engraved as *Les Charmes de la Vie*, and the *Concert* of the Royal Collection at Berlin. It has been seen, too, that *Pierrot content* is but a repetition somewhat further elaborated of *Les Jaloux*, which itself would appear to spring

¹ It is in some respects nearer still to the more elaborate *Signature du Contrat* in the Arenberg Collection.

from *Harlequin jaloux*. The version of the *Accordée de Village* at the Sloane Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields is an undoubted original, but, alas! little more now than a ruin, though here and there a gleam of jewel-like colour emerges which speaks unmistakably for the hand of the master himself. The poor *accordée*, who sits with her companions backed by a dais of red cloth, is almost entirely wiped out. A second version infinitely better preserved than this, and remarkable for the richness of the colour, is in the collection of Mrs. Broadwood.¹

The third version is that lent to the "Old Masters," on the occasion of the notable display of French pictures in 1889, by Mr. Alfred de Rothschild.² The recollection of the writer is somewhat less distinct as to this example, but he derived the impression that it maintained itself among the works of the master then at Burlington House, not as one of the most remarkable, but yet as an original. The background here shows a castle on high ground behind trees, while in Mrs. Broadwood's picture we find, instead of the castle, farm buildings, with a village church and cottages to the left. Larmessin's engraving agrees as to the background better with Mr. de Rothschild's example than with Mrs. Broadwood's. To this same group belongs the once admirable *Mariée de Village*, a composition of more than a hundred figures (engraved by C. N. Cochin), which is in the Sans-Souci Palace at Potsdam. We know from Dohme that the picture is so terribly ruined, so blackened and faded, that it was not judged worthy to take its place in the often-cited Exhibition of Old Masters at Berlin in 1883. Only the little heads have survived, and they stand out strangely, protected by the wonderful enamel-like impasto in which they are worked. This same even impasto in the faces is a typical sign of the productions of the mature period, and especially of those now under consideration.

Another important work giving a variation of the same theme is the *Signature du Contrat* in the gallery of the Duc d'Arenberg at Brussels (engraved by A. Cardon), the receipt for which, signed by Watteau, is said to be preserved in the archives of that family. Here a hundred figures are scattered about a park with fountains, cottages, tents, and clumps of fine trees. Bürger takes this picture to belong to the extreme

¹ No. 43 at the "Old Masters" in 1892. Canvas, 22½ by 30½ inches.

² No. 107 *ibid.* in 1889. Canvas, 21 by 26½ inches.

youth of the painter, but this can scarcely be the case. His subjects, except in decoration pure and simple, were then quite other, and he had not until somewhat later on acquired the experience which would have enabled him to deal successfully with so vast a number of figures.

A *Fête champêtre*, belonging to the same class as the foregoing series of works, and consisting like them of groups of small figures of gem-like colouring, partly overshadowed by the dark masses of noble trees, is in the collection of Colonel Edward Browell, R.A., at Woolwich. This picture appears to have hitherto escaped the engraver and the cataloguer, yet it is, in the opinion of the writer, who has seen and examined it carefully, beyond reasonable doubt genuine.

A little later on, and we come to one of the masterpieces of Watteau, the inimitable *Plaisirs du Bal* of the Dulwich Gallery (engraved in reverse by G. Scotin), a picture the popularity of which in and after the artist's own time is shown by the fact that several repetitions or copies are known to exist, of which one, by Pater, is in the grand collection at Hertford House, and another, the author of which cannot be named, in the Neues Palais at Potsdam. That it was at the time of Watteau's greatest vogue in the last century looked upon as one of his most notable works is proved by the fact that it is among the very few mentioned by name by Caylus.¹ Here we have the true, complete Watteau at last, brought to ripeness by the study of Rubens and the Venetians, his masters, but all himself now, no less when he executes than when he imagines. The composition is in its unconventional freedom—with its massing of numerous small figures at the sides, and its great airy space in the middle, devoted to the minuet dancers—one of Watteau's happiest. The *mise-en-scène*, though its component parts—its costume, its architecture, its park-like scenery, and its cool, gleaming fountain—were those which the painter was enabled to take direct from his own surroundings, has an element in it of the fantastic, an indefinable something of the fairy tale, of the "light that never was on sea or land." We think less here of the Luxembourg, or St. Cloud, or the palaces and gardens of indolent delight where the Parabère and her rivals disported themselves—willing

¹ He cites it as *Le Bal*. A drawing by Watteau for the dancing gentleman is in the Louvre, and seven other studies for figures in the picture have been engraved from the master's drawings in the *Figures de différents Caractères*.



FIVE STUDIES OF LADIES SEATED ON THE GROUND.

From the drawing by Watteau in the Malcolm Collection (British Museum).

nymphs to whom the Regent of France played satyr—than of some ball in a land of enchantment, in which a *prince charmant*, wearing the dainty garb of the eighteenth century, figures, under the eyes of a brilliant court, with the loveliest and most enamoured of princesses. Yet there is no reason to assume that Watteau deliberately set to work to produce any such effect as this, or that, in lifting his work a little above the everyday world, in expressing its poetic essence without falsifying its elements, he worked with that sort of deliberate self-consciousness which belongs rather to the literary artist, or to the painter working according to literary methods, than to the painter born, who sees his subject ready-made in the mind's eye. No doubt, too, the present state of the picture, the deepening and partial disintegration of the shadows, the consequent emergence with a curious glitter of the high-lights on the flesh and draperies, given in solid impasto, lends to the piece an air of mystery such as it did not wear to the same degree when it was fresh.

It is, above all, here and in the beautiful little *Assemblée dans un Parc* in the La Caze section of the Louvre that we find those *étoffes de soie toujours sujettes à donner des petits plis*, which Caylus especially notes.¹ In these pieces the mannerism of the innumerable little folds and wrinkles of satin and silk which, standing out, catch the light on their ridges, is carried to a point of exaggeration sufficiently striking to mark them out even among works of their class. The same peculiarity, though in a much less accentuated form, is to be noted in the masterly little *Champs Elysées* of the Hertford House Collection (engraved in the dimensions of the original by Tardieu).² This last is as a composition one of the happiest and most unconventional things that even Watteau has left behind. The company of ladies is scattered on the grass with a seeming carelessness, but a really exquisite skill, and with them the little group of children on the one hand and the figures of two cavaliers and a recumbent nymph of stone on the other make lines as harmonious as they are remote for the drawing-master's ideal. Here we find children

¹ These curious little folds are given in truer and more convincing fashion than in the paintings in a unique drawing in sanguine, No. 246 in the public exhibition at the British Museum (Malcolm Collection), showing from the back, in several positions, the figures of two ladies seated on the ground (see p. 54).

² No. 93 at the "Old Masters" in 1889.

depicted with that sympathetic charm, that natural expression of childish gaiety, which up to our master's time had been so rare in the later art, save that of his exemplar Rubens; but at the same time with a certain stiffness and an occasional failure to hit upon the true movement which is not to be noted in the drawings. This remark applies only to the clothed children, and not to those irresistible naked *amorini* of the *Embarquement* which with a more delightful vivacity, a more delicate charm, emulate those of the Antwerp master himself. The most successful of all Watteau's paintings of children is that very small panel *Heureux Âge ! Âge d'Or !* (engraved by Tardieu) which is in the collection of Mr. Alfred de Rothschild.¹ Another piece of similar character, but vastly increased dimensions is the *Iris, c'est de bonne heure avoir l'air à la Danse* in the Neues Palais at Potsdam. Here the figures are—a rather unusual thing in paintings of the class to which it belongs—about one quarter life-size, and the handling is a little empty, the whole wanting in the usual vivacity. The anonymous engraving on a very small scale disguises these defects, and for once gives in some respects a better idea of the picture than it deserves.²

The Dulwich *Plaisirs du Bal* has suffered something from the outrages of time and the imprudent methods of execution adopted by the painter; yet nothing like as much as the ruined *Accordée* in the Sloane Museum, the *Faux Pas* in the La Caze Gallery at the Louvre (laid bare, moreover, by the cleaner), the hopelessly destroyed *Mariée de Village* of Potsdam, or the cracked and wrinkled *Leçon d'Amour* in the same Royal Collection—to take only such instances as occur to the writer at the moment. All Watteau's biographers are in agreement as to the carelessness of his technique in some material particulars, and especially in his abuse of *huile grasse* (thick linseed oil). Caylus, who saw his master at work, and on a point like this may be trusted, says that when he began painting again upon a canvas he was in the habit of rubbing it over with thick oil,

¹ No. 86 at the "Old Masters" in 1889.

² The *Iris* would appear to belong to a later time in Watteau's career than the one we are now discussing, but the period of his maturity (1712–1721) being so short, it is a matter of the greatest difficulty to place even conjecturally in their chronological order the works comprised within it. Comparison by means of photography comes to our assistance, but cannot be wholly relied upon where colour plays so all-important a part as it does in the master's works.



Les Champs Élysées by Watteau. From the engraving by N. Tardieu.

and then painting afresh on the top of this, paying dearly in the result for the momentary advantage thus gained. Rarely too—says the same authority—did he clean his palette, and it often remained for days unrenewed. The pot of thick oil of which he made such lavish use was filled with refuse and dirt, and mixed up with the colours of all sorts



La Danse ("Iris c'est de bonne heure"), by Watteau. From the anonymous engraving.

which came off his brushes when he dipped them in. Gersaint, a much kinder critic as a rule, says: "That he might the more promptly get rid of work which he had begun and was compelled to finish, he was in the habit of charging his brush with a quantity of thick oil, in order to lay on his colour the more easily. It must be owned that some of his pictures are from this cause perishing from day to

day ; that they have entirely changed colour and have become hopelessly dirty in aspect. On the other hand those which are exempt from this defect are admirable, and will always hold their own in the most famous collections."

The writer confesses to some doubt as to where exactly to place the *Occupation selon l'Âge*, of which Mantz laments the disappearance, while admitting dubitatively that it may be the picture mentioned in J. W. Mollett's biography (1883) as being in the collection of Mr. Andrew James. There can, however, be no doubt in the mind of any one who has seen this last picture¹ that it is indeed the original work engraved by Dupuis, and for which so unusual a number of preparatory studies can be traced. A certain emptiness in the handling of the comparatively large figures, a lack of that jewel-like brilliancy of colour which distinguishes the works of the mature period might lead to the conclusion that it is at any rate earlier than the first version of the *Embarquement*; but, on the other hand, the execution has a breadth which points to the later time. This is a pleasing piece of semi-realism, showing some of that charm and bourgeois simplicity which we find afterwards in Chardin, with more insistence on grace and amiability and a less convincing truth than distinguishes the works of the later master. We have here realism of a kind that could not well have been observed in Valenciennes, the Flemish border-city, but must have been studied in the circle of those gentle, cultured, well-to-do citizens, among whom Watteau was thrown in Paris, both before and after the period of his residence in that paradise of art and fashion, the Hôtel Crozat.

With *L'Occupation selon l'Âge* may be grouped the *Repas de Campagne* (engraved by Desplaces), though in this last is to be noted a touch of sentimental rusticity, such as Greuze in France and, in a different fashion, Gainsborough in England afterwards developed to excess at the expense of truth.

All this time the painters Barrois and Antoine Coypel, appointed by the French Academy to supervise the execution of Watteau's diploma piece, had found their office a sinecure, for the artist, busy with his

¹ No. 50 at the "Old Masters" in 1891, from the collection of the late Miss James, and soon afterwards sold at Christie's for 5,200 guineas. No. 55 in same exhibition was *L'Accord parfait* from the same collection, there called *A Garden Party*.

studies at Crozat's and his pictures, had been too pleasantly and too profitably occupied to complete his noviciate by the production of the required masterpiece. Be it remembered that not only figuratively, but actually, must the piece upon which depended the definitive election of the member be executed in the Louvre, where the Academy was domiciled, and, what is more, under the eyes of the appointed inspectors.¹

Already, on January 5th, 1714, the Academy had called upon Watteau to explain his delay,² and at the first sitting of 1715 another call to order was recorded. On January 25th, 1716, we find the Academy, indulgent beyond its wont, according to the *Sieur Watteau* another delay, and yet again on January 9th, 1717, giving him one month more—evidently this time a last final chance.

Watteau now resigns himself to his fate, and, finding his way again to the Louvre, paints there as hastily as may be the *Embarquement pour Cythère*, one of the glories of French art, and on the whole, though it is in some respects rather a brilliant sketch than a finished picture, the masterpiece of the artist.

At the sitting of August 28th, 1717, the Academy, having taken cognisance of this picture, which it styles in its minutes a *feste galante*, formally receives Watteau and admits him to the privileges of full membership. That he at this moment already enjoys considerable fame with his brother artists is shown by the fact that the meeting is an exceptionally brilliant one, the minutes being signed by most of the eminent painters, sculptors, and engravers attached to the Academy, among them being Watteau's old master Gillot, who has himself been received in 1715.

This version of the *Embarquement* has, fortunately for France, never quitted the Louvre, which inherited it from the Academy with the other *morceaux de réception*.

To follow Théophile Gautier and MM. de Goncourt, both of whom have expended their finest verbal magic in describing the Louvre picture, would be an ungrateful task ; and, moreover, a fresh description is rendered unnecessary by the reproduction here given, not, however,

¹ This mode of proceeding survives in our own day in the competitions for the Prix de Rome, which are carried on by the students working *en loge* under supervision.

² Mantz, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1889, vol. i.



L'Embarquement pour Cythere.

From the picture in the Royal Palace at Vienna

Antique Museum, Paris, 1810

1810, 1810

from the first version which remains in France, but from that more finished and elaborate painting now in the Royal Palace of Berlin. This last was in the possession of Julienne at the time his famous work, reproducing the *Œuvre* of Watteau, was in the course of publication. It was engraved by Nicholas-Henri Tardieu for that series and published in 1733. Gautier's prose actually paints for us over again, in words which, in their exquisite finish of phrase, lose nothing of the spontaneity or charm which is here of the essence of the subject, the poetic fantasy of the eighteenth-century master. "But what words," he says in conclusion, "could describe the colour, so tender, so vaporous—so ideal, so well chosen to express a dream of youth and happiness, bathed in fresh azure, and in the distance enveloped in a luminous haze, made to glow in the foreground with the transparency of light, warm shadows—truthful as nature, yet brilliant as the apotheosis in an opera? Rubens and Paul Veronese would willingly recognise in Watteau one of their descendants."

And then MM. de Goncourt, refraining from a challenge to Gautier on his own ground, expand their descriptions of the colour and technique in the *Embarquement* into a veritable wheel of coloured fire, dazzling and confusing the reader more than they really instruct him.

To estimate the master-work at its true worth, to appreciate what a novelty, what a revival of poetry and fancy it was in the pictorial art of the world, one must remember that in 1717 Louis XIV. had been but two years dead, the Regency was but two years old, the eighteenth century was as yet in its infancy. And then it was—with the works of which it is the apex and the typical instance—the first genuine painted poem that Europe had seen since the golden days of the Venetian Renaissance. And by this is not meant a poem in the literary sense, a laboured, chilling allegory depending for its adequate comprehension on all sorts of extraneous circumstances, but a rainbow-hued picture of humanity and nature, presented in the beautifying yet not misleading, light of the imagination—the true vision transcribed by the answering hand of the poet-painter. The seventeenth century had been a great period—we may say as great even as its predecessor in the centuries, when we remember that its protagonists were Rembrandt, Rubens, Velasquez; but art of this peculiar type it had not produced,

unless in the works, minute in dimensions and execution, but in conception noble and aspiring, of Adam Elsheimer.¹

It may be that the painter had vaguely in view the renewal of Cytherea's reign, the breaking loose again of life and love, after that period of solemnity and repression when the *Grand Monarque*, old and weary, was unconsciously dominated by the sham prude, Mme. de Maintenon. If so, he has transformed and re-created by the magic of his art a subject which in other hands might have become either a mere, insipid, allegorical-mythological decoration or a pretty, vapid, slightly prurient piece of eighteenth-century genre. Think how flat and trivial, with all his piquancy and decorative skill, Lancret would have been under the same conditions; how merely empty and mechanical in his grace and charm Pater; how heavy and literal in his expression of amorous conversation De Troy; how prurient and how conventional at the same time that most skilful and ready of designers, Boucher! Only Fragonard—the Watteau of the century in its decline—could have coloured such a subject as this with the creative power that was in him. He, indeed, would have sent a pulsation of ardent passion through his love-pilgrims of which Watteau was incapable, while lending to his scene a measure of the same half-artificial, half-natural charm; but then his Cytherea would have been frankly the goddess of the lower, the more animal love.

It is when Watteau is face to face with the undraped female form that he comes nearest to the common earth, and it would be idle to deny that here we occasionally find, in the least offensive form, however, that suggestiveness which belongs peculiarly to his century. Curiously enough this is to be noted less in such paintings as the *Diane au Bain* (engraved by P. Aveline),² or the *Toilet* of the Hertford House collection,³ or the pretty numerous drawings in which the nude figure is studied,⁴ than in

¹ Imagination of another and an infinitely higher order was shown by Rembrandt in those sublime visions in which he re-created the scenes of the great sacred drama; but here we are on altogether different ground.

² Now in the collections of M. Stéphane Bourgeois, of Paris, who acquired it recently in or near London.

³ No. 108 at the "Old Masters" in 1889.

⁴ Some of those which in his last moments the master considered too free in expression were brought together by him and destroyed.



*Diversissement champêtre ("Das Liebesfest"), by Watteau. From the picture in the
Dresden Gallery.*

the painted representations of divinities sculptured in stone or marble. Take as instances the Goddess of Love with three cupids in the second version of the *Embarquement*, the very similar figure in the so-called *Fête d'Amour* at Dresden, the too substantial nymph of stone so intently gazed at by a cavalier in the *Fête champêtre* of the same gallery, the equally unclassical figure in the *Leçon d'Amour*, the recumbent nymph with an urn in the *Champs Elysées*. The treatment of the female form recalls here a little the Flemish mode in its frankness and unabashed realism, but is all the same, in its development in the direction of elegance, distinctively French, and personal to the artist. There is more of flesh than of marble in these figures, colourless stone as they are; the Venus is alert, piquant, and Parisian in her aggressive and purely human charm, unless she is directly copied from the *Venus of the Capitol* type, as in the already-cited *Portraits of Julienne and Watteau*. The nymphs are of the Seine rather than of any more classical provenance.

But to return for a moment after this too long digression to the *Embarquement* of the Louvre. Some part of the indefinable charm which the picture exercises is due to the visionary character of the landscape with its far-stretching distance of calm waters backed by snow-capped mountains tipped with rose; to the all-pervading sunny atmosphere which enwraps, and brings into a golden unity of tone, the brilliant little groups and figures with their sheeny garments of rose, yellow, blue, *gorge de pigeon*, and purplish violet. Is it not Bürger who says, in describing *La Finette*, that Watteau paints not so much the colours of things as the colours of the air—a pretty but extreme way of putting the fact that he subtly observes, and allows for, the influence of open-air atmospheric effect in bringing together and modifying the myriad jewel-like hues of his palette, and that when he paints sunlight he concedes to it the domination which it really has over individual colours.

The second and definitive version is, as has already been pointed out, the one formerly in the possession of Julienne, and now one of the greatest treasures of the Royal Palace at Berlin. It is evident that Watteau himself regarded this as the finished picture, the Louvre version only as the preliminary effort. There are in fact in it, as compared with the latter, many improvements. Thus, to take one out of many instances, the stone term of Venus in the earlier version becomes in the Berlin



La Finette, by Watteau. From the picture in the La Caze Collection at the Louvre.

picture the charming full-length statue of the goddess with cupids ; the bee-like swarm of loves who hover in mid-air above the brilliant galley which is to carry the pilgrims is denser, better poised and balanced in No. 2 than in No. 1. The right-hand group near the statue receives many additions ; the little god who nestles, subtly persuasive, into the skirts of the undecided beauty being, moreover, naked instead of half-clothed in the piquant pilgrim garb—a very doubtful improvement this. The gilded ship of the pilgrimage is more clearly defined, and the actual embarkation of the amorous couples indicated. The vaporous, undefined sea of No. 1 becomes more like a closed lake in No. 2—another doubtful improvement. Thus holes in the composition are filled up, defects corrected, figures and groups elaborated and improved. Yet, with all this, in the *Embarquement* of Berlin, beautiful as it is, and in its admirable state of preservation one of the finest of extant Watteaus, some of the light, some of the original inspiration of the subject, some of the pictorial charm has died out. The conception is more accurately defined, and perhaps for that very reason less beautiful. In the little piece *Bon Voyage*, known now only in the engraving of Audran, we have the chief incident of the *Embarquement*—the love-pilgrim seeking to persuade his fair companion to join the expedition ; but here he pleads unaided by the naughty little Cupid who acts as go-between in the complete picture. It seems likely on the whole that we have in *Bon Voyage* the first idea for the *Embarquement* rather than an echo of one of its most charming motives ; but the point is not easy to decide without some evidence beyond the comparison of the two compositions.

In another painted poem of a most seductive languor, *L'Ile enchantée* (engraved by P. le Bas), we have a fair land of dreams, on the mist-enwrapped shores of which the pilgrims of the *Embarquement* might well have landed to disport themselves.

It is a little difficult again to place exactly that exceptional work the *Holy Family* (engraved by Jeanne Rénard du Bos),¹ because there is practically nothing of its own kind available for comparison with it. We may, however, fairly surmise that it is that *Repos de la Sainte Famille* mentioned by Watteau, in a letter (unfortunately not dated) addressed to Julienne, as being destined for the Abbé de Noirterre in return for

¹ Now in the Imperial Palace of Gatchina, near St. Petersburg.

the present of a picture by Rubens—apparently an *Assumption*—of which the painter says that since he has seen it he cannot remain still, his eyes being drawn again and again towards the canvas on the desk where he has placed it. If this identification be accepted, the date of the picture would be about that of the *Rendezvous de Chasse*, that is some time in 1720.¹

Of a whole little series of works we may assume with tolerable certainty that they belong to the period immediately after the *Embarquement*, since one of them, the *Music Lesson* in the Hertford House Collection,² was engraved by L. Surugue in 1719, and published with that date. This, with its play of light and shadow, its silvery tone and exquisite finish, is one of the finest of Watteau's small paintings, although the musician playing on a long-handled guitar is not happily hit off either in expression or movement. The *Concert* in the collection of the Royal House of Prussia is a kind of repetition or re-arrangement of this last-named piece; and the much larger *Music Party* at Hertford House³ (engraved as *Les Charmes de la Vie*, by Aveline) is again a development of the same theme, much as the *Embarquement* may have been a development of the *Bon Voyage*. In this important though much injured work, Veronese, with his silver tone and his bright, stimulating chords of colour, is in the ascendant. With these pictures, in which music is the central motive, may conveniently be classed *L'Accord parfait* (engraved by Baron), formerly in the collection of Miss James, the *Leçon d'Amour* in the collection of the Royal House of Prussia, which was engraved by Paul Mercier, and also by Dupuis for Julienne's great work, and the *Gamme d'Amour*, lately in the collection of Mrs. Lyne Stephens.

Mark how, more or less in all this little group of pieces, the figures have an inner life and reflectiveness of their own, and are not so much dramatically brought together as connected by a community of mood. Even when he is avowedly dealing with the stage, as in inventions of the class to be considered in the next chapter, the master aims at representing moods and moments of evanescent feeling more than mere dramatic scenes; when he attempts these last, which is but rarely, we have seen that he almost invariably fails.

¹ E. and J. de Goncourt, *Watteau*, p. 44.

² No. 98 at the "Old Masters" in 1889.

³ No. 97 *ibid.*

CHAPTER IV

"He has been a sick man all his life. He was always a seeker after something in the world that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all."

WALTER PATER.

WE must retrace our steps considerably, and halt a moment at the year 1716, in the month of June of which the Italian comedians banished by Louis Quatorze under the circumstances already mentioned were recalled by the Regent, and received by Paris with open arms. They played at the Opera until their own theatre, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, could be repaired and put into decent order again, and were privileged to call themselves the "Comédiens italiens de S.A.R. Monseigneur le duc d'Orléans." The date is of importance, since we are thus compelled to group between 1716 and 1721, the date of the painter's death, those numerous Comédie italienne pieces in which Watteau has expressed the very essence of his art. True, he might previously have made use of the studies and designs of his master Gillot, who knew the comedians before their expulsion in 1697, and utilised their bizarre charm; and, moreover, we know from Caylus that he possessed a wardrobe of costumes both festal and comic, and was in the habit of dressing up in them such persons as were good enough to serve as models, taking them preferably in the attitudes suggested by Nature herself. Still it seems in the highest degree unlikely that he could have procured the Comédie italienne dresses until the return of the troupe had made them familiar to a new generation.

An instance of such a travesty as this is the picture engraved by Thomassin fils as *Sous un Habit de Mezzetin*. Here the "gros brun au visage riant" who stands fronting the spectator, the centre of a group, is stated by Mariette to be the portrait of Sirois surrounded by his family; and Mantz deems it possible than even the famous *Gilles* of the La Caze

Collection in the Louvre may be the portrait under this habit of an accommodating neighbour posing before the artist.

Those who still cling to the romantic anecdote which would make of Watteau on his first appearance in Paris the painter-in-ordinary and the favourite of the *corps de ballet* at the Opera, though he could then have been but a raw provincial boy and a limner utterly inexperienced, will be equally unwilling to give up the legend which shows him the assiduous frequenter, even more behind the scenes than in the front of the house, of the Comédie italienne, and the favoured admirer of more than one actress. It is certain that Watteau was an *habitué* of the house, and took a great delight in the performances of the *Commedia dell' Arte*, in which the real and the ideal, the farcical and the imaginative elements were so strangely mingled. Yet it is more than likely that he who exaggerated shyness almost to the point of misanthropy, who was never the real Watteau save when he was hidden away from the world with his pictures and his few male friends, contented himself with the study of Columbine and her sisters as a spectator only. We need not imagine him a puritan or a moral exception in that time of license which was the Regency ; but Gersaint and Caylus expressly describe him as "libertin d'esprit, mais sage de mœurs," and as cold, embarrassed, not himself, in the company of strangers. It was the Comédie italienne itself that interested him, with its curious generalised types of humanity, with its streak of the ideal running through traditional farce, with its element of remoteness from the everyday world, and yet of actuality.

The *Gilles* of the La Caze collection is a full-length, life-size figure of the personage, wearing the loose white garments of Pierrot, and fronting the spectator with a humorous gaze full of suppressed vivacity, though the attitude is the professional one of puppet-like stiffness : in the background are other personages of the Italian Comedy. Here we have at once proof and disproof of the dictum that Watteau failed when he attempted figures in dimensions more considerable than those to which he in general restricted himself. The subsidiary figures lose here all true significance and become mere filling up, but the full-length of Gilles himself is a masterpiece of painting which hardly has its parallel in the French art of the eighteenth century. The treatment of the white dress painted in a full, even, open-air light, with delicate transparent shadows,

is only to be compared, for supreme mastery of a technical difficulty, with the so-called *White Nun* in Tiepolo's great altar-piece in the church of the Gesuati (S. M. del Rosario) at Venice. Even in this *Gilles*, however, though the piece is evidently a portrait, there is an element of the impersonal; Watteau here as elsewhere seeks to express the type in the first place, the individual only in the second. Almost the only other instance in which our master attempted the human figure in life-size is the fine three-quarter length portrait of M. de Julienne now in the collection of M. Groult at Paris. The Mæcnas here appears leaning in rather dreamy fashion on a pedestal; he wears with a certain désinvoiture the usual flowing wig, and a magnificent embroidered suit which announces already the modes of Louis Quinze.

A small *Gilles and his Family*¹ belongs to the Hertford House Collection, and has something in common with *Les Jaloux*. The same personage stands in his characteristic attitude, the centre of the *Comédiens italiens* (engraved by Baron). But here, if the rôle is the same the actor who holds it is clearly another. The original work belonging to Dr. Mead was some five years ago recovered by M. Groult in London, and is now with the other Watteaus of his collection in Paris. Mantz describes it as extremely brilliant in colour and painted with a free and spirited touch; he guesses that the handsome disdainful coquette who stands next to Gilles may have been studied from an Englishwoman. If the writer's memory serves him, there is in the collection of Lord Iveagh at Grosvenor Place, a repetition or copy of the *Comédiens italiens*, rather heavy and dull in colour.

It has been assumed that this last picture and the *Amour paisible* (the one engraved by Baron), were painted during Watteau's sojourn in London, mainly, no doubt, because they both formed part of Dr. Richard Mead's collection, dispersed in 1754;² but this conjecture, though a fair and plausible one, is not otherwise corroborated, and it appears at least possible that the *Comédiens italiens*, of which the elements were not to be found in London, was taken to England by Watteau when he started.

Another delightful group of *Comédie italienne* types is that contained in the miniature masterpiece engraved by Thomassin fils with the foolish

¹ No. 95 in the "Old Masters" in 1889.

² The *Comédiens italiens* at that sale fetched £50.



Gilles, by Watteau. From the picture in the La Caze Collection at the Louvre.

and inappropriate verses beginning "*Coquettes qui pour voir galans au rendez-vous. . .*" The original picture is now in the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg. Then we have—to take only a few instances—the *Mezzetin jouant de la Guitare* of the Hermitage (engraved by B. Audran, and by L. Müller for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*) ; the injured but still charming *Voulez-vous triompher des Belles* (engraved by Thomassin) of the Hertford House Collection ;¹ *La Sérénade italienne* in the collection of Mr. Alfred de Rothschild ;² and the particularly exquisite little piece with Pierrot and Harlequin, in the collection of the Earl of Northbrook, and there misnamed *Masquerade*,³ but engraved by L. Surugue in 1719 under the title *Arlequin, Pierrot, et Scapin*.

Not to the Italian but probably to the French comedy types belong the popular pair of pictures in the La Caze Collection at the Louvre—*La Finette* and *L'Indifférent*. Both are in the first place original experiments in colour, in the second studies of character. *La Finette* sits playing on a guitar, robed all in greenish-grey under a grey evening sky with rosy reflections echoing her flesh-tints. The costume of *L'Indifférent* is all delicate rose-pinks and shades of blue, with *rappels* of these colours in the sky (both pictures were engraved by Rajon for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1870). The *Comédiens français* (engraved by J. M. Liotard) a companion piece to the *Comédiens italiens*, is now in an injured state at Berlin, in the collection of the Royal House. It is invaluable as a document, since it evidently gives faithfully the pompous Louis-Quatorzian tragedy costumes *à la Bérain*, as then still worn ; but as a presentment of even formal stage passion it is inadequate.

It is convenient to mention here, although there is no special reason for doing so in this particular place, two important Watteaus, both of them in England. The one is the *Fêtes vénitiennes* at Edinburgh, in the National Gallery of Scotland (engraved by Laurent Cars), the other the *Repast in a Wood* at the Dulwich Gallery. The Edinburgh picture which was once in Julienne's collection, and thence passed into that of Randon de Boisset, is a Watteau of very fine quality, clear and brilliant in colour, and well preserved.⁴ The Dulwich picture, though less

¹ No. 99 at the "Old Masters" in 1889 as *Harlequin and Columbine*.

² No. 100, *ibid.*

³ No. 94, *ibid.*

⁴ The National Gallery of Scotland possesses also another genuine Watteau—a delicately touched little pastoral, with a shepherd and shepherdess examining a bird's nest.

celebrated than its companion, the *Plaisirs du Bal*, is a work of peculiar charm, of a pathos which has little to do with the mundane subject, but depends upon the poetic twilight illumination. The longer, looser stroke of the brush in this piece contrasts curiously with the crispness and peculiar mannerism of the *Bal*. The composition of the *Repast in the Wood* is strikingly similar to that of the large *Rendez-vous de Chasse* presently to be mentioned, and, by analogy with some similar instances already discussed, we may reasonably assume that it preceded that work, and served as its foundation.

We do not know the exact date when Watteau renounced the splendid hospitality of Crozat, and recommenced his restless life of migration from place to place. Gersaint says that the love of liberty and independence caused him to take this step; that he was determined to live according to his caprice and even in obscurity. According to him Watteau then retired to a little lodging in the house of Sirois, and absolutely forbade his friends to disclose his address to those who should ask for it. Caylus makes him, on leaving the Hotel Crozat take up his residence with Nicholas Vleughels, a Parisian painter of Flemish extraction, who was one of his colleagues at the Academy, and had recently become his friend. Both statements may very well be true; the wanderer probably began with Sirois, and from him migrated to Vleughels.

Caylus, seeking to pose as the philosopher and the man of perfect balance before the august assembly to which he recalls after many years the events of Watteau's career, tells the Academicians that at this juncture, grieved at his instability and that lack of seriousness which prevented him from enjoying any prosperity in the present or having any expectations in the future, he lectured his friend to no purpose. To his arguments based on the state of the painter's health, which from day to day declined, on the uncertainty of his future, on that very love of independence which was one of his most excessive characteristics—to all this fine sermon Caylus only obtained the answer: "*Le pis aller, n'est-ce pas l'hôpital? On n'y refuse personne.*" We may, if we choose, read in these words a courageous disregard of what the future may bring forth, and so Mantz does interpret them. But may they not—seeing what is now already the physical and mental state of the hapless painter of *Fêtes galantes*—be just as well taken to express a kind of despair,

a feeling that the effort to ballast the ship and put her into the right course is no longer worth the making?

Of much more substantial benefit, according to Caylus's own showing, was the interference of M. de Julienne in Watteau's affairs. That we have here a real friendship, and not merely a bond of interest between patron and artist—an equal relation cemented by true sympathy—is proved not only by the double portrait already referred to, in which the friends are depicted together in the glade of a park,¹ but by the care taken by Julienne in insuring his *protégé's* welfare and putting his worldly affairs in order. The best evidence on record of this friendship belongs, however, to the period after Watteau's return from England, and will be most appropriately touched upon a little later on.

Watteau appears to have remained with Sirois until, some time in 1718, or the beginning of 1719, when he set up house with his comparatively new friend Vleughels in the remote and tranquil Faubourg St. Victor, then covered with convents and gardens. Vleughels himself, writing on the 20th of September, 1719, to the famous Venetian pastelliste Rosalba Carriera, says: "An excellent person, M. Watteau, of whom you have no doubt heard, has an ardent desire to know you. He would like to have even the least little specimen of your work, and in exchange would send you something of his own, since it would be impossible for him to offer you the real value in money of what you might send. He is my friend; we live together, and he begs me to present to you his humble respects." This enables us, without discrediting Caylus, who places the date of Watteau's journey to England in 1719, to fix it as having taken place in the last months of that year. As the diary of La Rosalba with its laconic entry on the 21st of August, 1720, "*Vu M. Vateau et un Anglais*" proves that he was back again in Paris at that date, the stay in London cannot have lasted the whole year that he attributes to it.

The supposition of Horace Walpole that our master, already then broken in health, crossed the Straits, not to earn English guineas but to consult the famous Dr. Richard Mead, will not resist a close

¹ The lines beginning "*Assis auprès de toi sous ces charmants ombrages*" were no doubt added afterwards, when the piece was engraved by Tardieu; but they are, at any rate, evidence of Julienne's affectionate regard for his friend.



Fêtes vénitiennes, by Watteau. From the picture in the National Gallery of Scotland.

examination, though it is certain that the two during our master's visit came into contact with each other. Watteau may well have been compelled when he got over here to seek medical advice, and it is pretty clear that his connection with Dr. Mead had some such origin as this. But that he, so careless of himself and his fortunes, so incapable of making plans ahead, should have undertaken the journey expressly to submit his case to the English doctor is hardly conceivable.

The strong probability is that, lectured as he was on his improvidence by his intimates, he resolved at last to make some provision for the future, and thought to make it in this way. Gersaint tells us that his friend's disinterestedness was so great that more than once he flew into a passion because he, Gersaint, persisted in offering him a reasonable price for certain things, which he out of generosity refused to accept. Then it is recorded that M. de Julienne rescued out of the shipwreck—the expression is Gersaint's—at the time of Watteau's departure for England 6,000 livres, and took charge of that sum for him, as afterwards appeared. The helpful friend notes, however, that during the stay in England, his works being much sought after and well paid for, the artist at last learnt the value of money, for which he had hitherto shown an excessive disdain.

An absolute stranger in London, and neither speaking nor understanding the language, Watteau was naturally miserable. In Paris he had the small band of companions with one of whom to take refuge when the demon of restlessness drove him onward yet another stage in the weary journey. To London he came alone, already a consumptive invalid, more in want than ever of the kindly ministrations of others, and he rapidly grew worse in the atmosphere of fog and coal-smoke, which even then distinguished the English from the French capital.

What Watteau actually painted over here, and where he painted, who were his friends and patrons, are so many matters of conjecture ; in a sea of uncertainty there are only one or two fixed islets of meagre fact. Both Gersaint and Caylus agree, however, that he was cordially received in England, and that from the business point of view he did well. Whether he actually painted much during his short voluntary exile, or disposed of pictures already painted, or derived advantage both in the one way and in the other is not recorded. It has been seen that the two pictures

included in the sale of Dr. Mead's Collection in 1754—the *Comédiens italiens* and the *Amour paisible*—are held to have been actually painted in England, mainly, no doubt, because they afterwards formed part of a contemporary English collection.

Again, there are in the Royal Collection of Buckingham Palace four canvases ascribed to Watteau—these being two *Fêtes Champêtres*, *M. de Pourceaugnac Pursued by his Women and Children*, and *Harlequin and Pierrot* in a composition of ten figures. The tradition is that these pictures were ordered of Watteau by George I. on the recommendation of Dr. Mead, and painted during the sojourn in England; yet there is nothing but hearsay to support this pretty story, which has in it, apart from the pictures themselves, elements of inherent improbability.

In the first place Dr. Mead was not physician to George I., but that very different thing, physician to George, Prince of Wales, and it was only in 1727 (on the accession of his Royal client as George II.) that he obtained the formal appointment.

In the second place the pictures speak for themselves, and it is difficult to understand how any one who has had an opportunity of examining them could have a moment's hesitation as to their origin. They are all four manifestly by Pater, and not of his very best. The emptiness of the handling, the superficial and lifeless prettiness, the lack of true character, are conclusive. The most curious thing is that the four pictures are actually catalogued in the Royal Collection as by the pupil, not the master, so that the attribution to Watteau must have rested entirely on some popular tradition. Mantz, quoting J. W. Mollett's statement, is evidently not convinced by it, but is unable to discuss the pictures themselves, which he has not seen.

Watteau while in London made the acquaintance of one Philippe Mercier, who, according to the *Anecdotes of Painting*, was a limner of portraits and familiar genre, of French origin but born in Berlin, and the pupil of Frederick the Great's court-painter, the Frenchman Pesne. There exists in the British Museum a very scarce print showing this Mercier surrounded by his family—Mrs. Mercier holding her husband's pipe, and one of the little girls riding astride a stick with a horse's head—which is believed to be taken from a slight sketch by Watteau, referred

to as such by Mariette. It is signed "P. M." (Philippe Mercier), a signature which is to be found on several mediocre prints after our master. Edmond de Goncourt, with whom on this point Mantz is in agreement, assigns to this third-rate painter, who thus in a way came within the sphere of Watteau's influence, the picture *L'Escamoteur*, catalogued as by the latter in the La Caze collection at the Louvre. It is the easier to accept as highly probable this attribution, seeing that the little genre subject in question is manifestly no Watteau, and as certainly a very second-rate performance.

Another trace of Watteau's residence in London is to be found in the curious print engraved (as late as 1739) by Arthur POUND, after a design by him. This is a satirical portrait of Dr. Misaubin, a French quack, who had settled in London, and was there earning a miserable living by the sale of certain pills, a supposed remedy against a disease which was terribly rife in the eighteenth century. He appears as lean as Romeo's apothecary, standing in a cemetery strewn with dead men's bones, skulls, and coffins. Mariette has it that this sinister and not very successful caricature was improvised by our painter across a table in a coffee-house. Some time in or before August 1720 Watteau must have journeyed back to Paris from the land of fog, since, as we have seen, he was on the 21st of August of that year, presented to La Rosalba. He had, as we must infer, derived some substantial benefit from his stay with us, but his malady, as was inevitable, had made further progress.¹

Rosalba Carriera, then about forty-five years of age and in the height of her fame, had been tempted to Paris by the financier Crozat, who had offered her the hospitality of the splendid mansion where, a few years before, Watteau had himself spent his happiest and most tranquil days.

It was not until February 1721 that the much-courted Venetian sat to Watteau for the portrait engraved by J. M. Liotard with the lines : "La plus belle des fleurs ne dure qu'un matin," and of which the original

¹ If Watteau did really, as we are told by Caylus and Gersaint, make money in England, it is not easy to make out where it went to. When he died a few months afterwards he left only the modest sum of 9000 livres, made up of the 6000 livres saved for him by M. de Julienne, and of 3000 produced by a sale of his effects carried out by Gersaint in his last days, when he was thinking of returning to Valenciennes.



Portrait of Rosalba Carriera, by Watteau. From the engraving by J. M. Liotard.

is now no longer traceable. An earlier state of the print actually bears the title *Rosa Alba*, and, moreover, the big white roses which the fair one holds up in her silken cloak are a transparent allusion to the name of the artist. Judging from the engraving, we find Watteau here curiously little of a physiognomist, but making up by freshness and piquancy for what he lacks in individuality. Nowhere, even in the best of his few portraits—such as the *Gilles* of the La Caze collection, the *Sirois*, the *M. de Julienne with Watteau*, or the *Portrait of the Musician Rebel* (engraved by Moyreau from a drawing by Watteau)—does he attain to that intensity of characterisation which distinguishes the great masters of portraiture, though he makes some amends by conveying a strong impression of vitality.

The *Rosalba* painted, or rather drew our artist at the same moment that he portrayed her. This likeness appeared in the *Lalivé de July* sale in 1769 and there fetched only one hundred and twenty-three livres.

She has hit herself off much more happily, so far as essential character goes, than her brother-artist did, in the portrait in the Dresden Gallery, in which she appears wearing coquettishly a blue cap and a mantle of the same colour, both trimmed with swansdown. Watteau had on his return from England taken up his quarters with the sieur Gersaint, his ever-faithful friend, who was now established as a dealer on his own account. He tells us that the painter came to him and asked to be permitted “pour se dégourdir les doigts,” to paint a *plafond*¹ which Gersaint was to exhibit outside. He hesitated to agree to this, thinking that it would be much better to occupy Watteau with something worthier of him, but, seeing that he would thus be giving his friend pleasure, he finally consented. The result was the famous *Enseigne de Gersaint* (engraved by P. Aveline). “It is well known,” the dealer proceeds to say, “what a success the piece had. The whole was done direct from nature; the attitudes were so true and easy, the arrangement so natural, the groups were so well hit off, that the gaze of the people passing by was drawn towards them, and even the most

¹ A signboard painted to be hung up outside could not of course be a ceiling, and the work shows no sign whatever of having been designed to be looked at from below. Gersaint wrote his *Memoir* in 1744, that is twenty-four years after the picture was painted. The word is, however, used in similar fashion to denote a famous signboard painted for a barber-surgeon by Chardin.



Watteau, Dine.

Braun, Clement & Co. Ph. Sc.

*L'Enseigne de Gersaint (right half)
From the picture in the Royal Palace at Berlin.*

skilful painters came more than once to admire. It was the work of eight days, and during that time, he only painted on the picture in the morning, being hindered by his weakness from devoting longer sittings to it. It is the only production which at all stimulated his *amour-propre*, and this he did not hesitate to confess to me. M. de Julienne now owns it, and it has been engraved under his auspices."

The *Enseigne* passed afterwards out of the collection of Gersaint and was, by what Vandal we know not, cut into two halves—a proceeding to which the curious composition of the piece, with its two main groups absolutely distinct the one from the other, rather easily lends itself. Both halves were at different times and from different persons acquired in Paris by the skilful agents of Frederick the Great, and the work is now in the old Palace of Berlin, with the *Embarquement* and other fine examples of French eighteenth-century art.¹ Here we have our master, almost for the only time since he became completely himself, face to face with an everyday subject calling for realistic treatment—one, indeed, which its very nature precluded him from poetizing, though not from adorning with that inimitable sprightliness and grace which was inseparable from his style. The conception is a purely Flemish one, resembling those of Teniers—in the numerous canvases in which he portrayed the gallery of the Archduke Leopold William of which he was the keeper—and of many another Netherlandish artist of the seventeenth century who could be named. We must not expect of Watteau in a piece which was primarily a decoration, the mere documentary accuracy of those Netherlandish predecessors, or the mordant satire of manners with which Hogarth delights us in not dissimilar subjects. The composition of this wonderful improvisation is fairly open to criticism, divided as it is by the door of the shop in the centre into two nearly equal halves; but the painting of the framed pictures and mirrors on the walls is masterly in its breadth and ease, and most happily subordinated to the figures. The eighteenth century has produced nothing more charming of its kind, more fresh and delicious in its genuine elegance, than the group of smart customers, female and male, who are seen examining Gersaint's pictures, *bibelots*, and works of art. The tone of the painting which, unlike so many of the master's produc-

¹ A reduced copy of the *Enseigne*, by Pater, appeared at the Secrétan sale in 1889.

tions, is in perfect preservation, is not the *ton fleuri* with which we meet as a rule in the period of his maturity, but a cool, silvery harmony parsimonious of bright colour yet of most potent effect ; and the execution is of an evenly sustained breadth throughout.

As painted in a silvery, greenish-grey tone and with a surprising ease and mastery of handling, the writer would like to place in this late period, after Watteau's return from England, the two spirited and delightful pictures in the Dresden Gallery, of which No. 781 is one of the most fascinating of all the *Fêtes galantes*, and No. 782, called after a stone effigy of the love-goddess in the foreground the *Fête-d'Amour*, is not less fine or less spontaneous in execution than its companion, though as a composition it must be pronounced straggling and ineffectual. Akin to these paintings in style and colouring, and in a certain slighness combined with sureness of handling, is the *Fête champêtre*, No. 474^b, in the Berlin Gallery, a picture which was transferred in 1889 from one of the royal palaces to the State museum.

In the same gallery are two of the most complete and admirable, two of the best preserved of all the master's works dealing with the stage, *L'Amour au Théâtre français* (engraved by C. N. Cochin) and *L'Amour au Théâtre italien* (engraved by the same). The annexed reproduction of the former painting renders unnecessary any detailed description ; in suavity and poetic charm it is the rival of the *Plaisirs du Bal* at Dulwich. In *L'Amour au Théâtre italien*, we have the Italian comedy almost complete : Pierrot in the middle of the circle of actors playing the lute to Columbine ; further on the Dottore di Bologna with his long false nose, Harlequin next to Pierrot, fat, jolly Mezzetin lighting up the night-scene with his torch—then, lastly, two young gentlemen in costume, who may be Scapin and Brighella. Nowhere else is the characterisation of the comedy personages by Watteau so keen or so humorous as here, and the piece has an irresistible buoyancy, a contagious charm, which give it a place apart even in his gallery of stage pictures.

The Berlin Gallery possesses besides these three admirable Watteaus, another little piece, *La Colation*, from the Suermondt Collection (engraved by Crépy fills).

A letter addressed by Watteau to M. de Julienne on the 2nd of September 1720,¹ enables us to fix as belonging to this latest

¹ MM. de Goncourt, *Watteau*, p. 43 (from the *Archives de l'Art français*).

period of our master's career the important *Rendez-vous de Chasse*,¹ now in the Hertford House Collection. "I cannot disguise from myself," he writes, "that this great canvas gives me pleasure, and I hope for some corresponding satisfaction on your part, and on that of Madame de Julienne, who like myself is greatly attracted by this hunting-subject. It became necessary for Gersaint to fetch La Serre for me, so that he might enlarge the canvas on the right side where I have added the horses under the trees. I felt hampered in that corner since I had added all that was decided upon (with respect to that part of the composition). I intend to resume work on that side of the canvas after mid-day on Monday, because in the morning I shall be busy devising the motives in sanguine. . . ."

This last passage is especially precious as showing Watteau actually at work. Even when adding an important group to a canvas of unusual size he makes no set design, but helps himself with *des pensées à la sanguine*.

The *Rendez-vous de Chasse*, is not in the best condition, and the composition has a certain one-sidedness well explained by the above passage from Watteau's letter. The touch shows, however, all that breadth and ease which distinguishes the painter's work at this period, and the spacious landscape—a forest-glade of Rubens-like character—is full of charm. Of identical dimensions (50 in. by 75 in.) and, it may be, executed as a pendant to it, is another picture from Hertford House, known as *The Garden Party*.² This is the *Fête champêtre* from the collection of Cardinal Fesch, which, with the rest of Lord Hertford's pictures appeared at the Manchester Exhibition in 1857, and there by the beauty of its sunset landscape and its sparkling figures delighted both Bürger and Mantz.

Watteau after six months' residence with Gersaint—that is about the beginning of 1721—finds his weakness on the increase, and fearing to become a burden to his kind host, insists on another apartment being procured for him. Gersaint has learnt by this time that to contradict or thwart the restless, wilful invalid is useless, and he accordingly obeys and takes a new lodging. It must have been now, in this last

¹ No 102 at the "Old Masters" in 1889.

² No. 91 *Ibid.*

station but one of his piteous onward course, that he writes to M. de Julienne, from Paris, the letter which by inference we are enabled to date the 3rd of May, 1721. For his solace Julienne has lent to him a great tome of Leonardo da Vinci's works, and this the sick painter returns, retaining for further perusal some manuscript letters of his idol Rubens. Quite simply, and without any whining for sympathy, he mentions that his sufferings deprive him of sleep, and begs for a visit on Sunday, promising as an inducement to exhibit some trifles, such as views of Nogent, done from sketches made in the company of Madame de Julienne. He winds up, faithful to the last to his art: "Je ne fais pas ce que je veux, en ce que la pierre grise et la pierre de sanguine sont fort dures en ce moment; je n'en puis avoir d'autres."

Again the malady passes into a more acute phase; his weariness increases, that restlessness, so entirely a symptom of his disease, and of which even the kindest friends so unkindly complain, augments; and he imagines, not unnaturally that he will breathe more freely in the country. He becomes impatient, and only regains his tranquillity when he learns that M. le Febvre, solicited by his friend, M. l'Abbé Haranger, Canon of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, has granted him an apartment in his house at Nogent near Vincennes. To this, his final resting-place Gersaint now conducts him, and returns every two or three days to afford the dying man what consolation he can. It is here that must be placed the most pathetic incident in the whole short career which in its very simplicity and lack of tragic incident, in the contrast which it affords between the man and his work, is so moving.

He had dismissed his fellow-townsmen, Jean-Baptiste Pater, after a short apprenticeship, either from motives of professional jealousy, or more probably because his impatient spirit could not support the irksomeness of a routine of teaching. He now reproached himself with having failed to do justice to the natural talent which he had recognised in Pater, and even, with the frankness of one who had no longer anything to conceal, owned to Gersaint that he had feared him. "He begged me," says the latter, "to send for him to Nogent so that he might do something towards repairing the injury he had inflicted upon him by his neglect, and so that he might at least profit by such instruction as he was still able to give. Watteau made him work in his

presence and gave up to him the remaining days of his life ; but Pater could only take advantage for a single month of this favourable opportunity. Death too promptly carried off Watteau. Pater confessed to me afterwards that all he knew he owed to this short space of time of which he was thus enabled to take advantage.”¹

Almost in his last days he occupied himself in painting for the curé of Nogent, whose ministrations he received, a *Christ on the Cross surrounded by Angels*.² Caylus says of this picture that if it had not the nobility or the elegance which such a subject calls for, it at least gave expression to the pain and suffering which the sick man felt when he painted it. Watteau's biographer is here again open to the suspicion of having coined for the occasion a fine phrase in consonance with the official traditions of the Academy.

The moribund painter, still pursued by the gadfly which stung him to move and ever to move, now felt a longing for his native air, and imagined that even yet it might cure him of his malady. It was at this point that, in order to provide funds, he caused Gersaint to make a sale of his effects, which realised 3,000 livres. Day after day he went on hoping against hope that he might regain strength sufficiently to undertake the journey, in which the devoted Gersaint was to accompany him ; but he was now rapidly sinking, and suddenly on the 18th of July, 1721, the final collapse came and he expired in the arms of his friend.

His little fortune of 9,000 livres went to the representatives of his family, and his drawings—the treasure which he himself valued most—were divided among his four dearest friends, M. de Julienne, l'Abbé Haranger, Hénin, and Gersaint. The *Mercure*, of which another intimate, Antoine de la Roque, was at the time director, announced his death in the following terms : “ The graceful and elegant painter whose death we announce was very distinguished in his profession. His memory will be ever dear to the true amateurs of painting. . . . ”

¹ One reason why the writer has placed in the last year of Watteau's life the two important pictures in the Dresden Gallery, already mentioned, is that their silvery grey-green tonality and piquancy of execution evidently inspired Pater, whose whole style seems based upon this peculiar and unusual phase of his master's art.

² Perhaps suggested by *Le Crucifix aux Anges* of Le Brun, now in the Louvre, Watteau's last picture appeared once again at the Marchant sale in 1779, where it fetched 130 livres. It cannot now be traced.

Watteau's old patron Crozat, writing to La Rosalba at Venice on the 11th of August, 1721, says : " We have lost poor M. Watteau who ended his days brush in hand." The Academy contents itself with a bare mention on its minutes of the painter's death. But then Watteau was the most unacademical of Academicians ; his style, his methods, his subjects were all more or less outside what the official body then professed, and his disregard of tradition and conventionality in art was only equalled by his disregard of the Academy and its interests, of the written and unwritten laws by which it was regulated.

The true monument raised to the memory of Watteau, and one of the noblest records in existence of an artist's life-work is M. de Julienne's colossal *Recueil* published in 1734 under this title :—"*L'Œuvre d'Antoine Watteau, Peintre du Roy en son Académie Roïale (sic) de Peinture et Sculpture. Gravé d'après ses tableaux et desseins (sic) originaux tirés du Cabinet du Roy et des plus curieux de l'Europe. Par les soins de M. de Julienne. (Engravers, Tardieu, B. Audran, C. N. Cochin, Thomassin fils, Laurent Cars, De Larmessin, Le Bas, Lépicié, Aveline, J. M. Liotard, &c. &c.)*."

These two magnificent volumes, which contain reproductions of the vast majority of Watteau's more important works, and among them of many the originals of which are no longer to be traced, still stands forth as the most precious of all documents in connection with the master's art, and will yet no doubt be the means of adding to the list of his authentic paintings some which at present remain unidentified or have been given up as lost.

In the great *Recueil* is incorporated that delightful series of character and costume studies, "*Figures de Modes, dessinées et gravées à l'eau-forte par Watteau et terminées au burin par Thomassin le fils*." Of these only seven are, according to M. E. de Goncourt, etched by Watteau (see *Catalogue raisonné*). The *Recueil* also includes the even more characteristic "*Figures francaises et comiques nouvellement inventées par M. Watteau, peintre du Roy*" (engraved by Thomassin, Cochin, &c.).

The second instalment of this great undertaking consisted of the "*Figures de différent Caractères de Paysages et d'Etudes par Antoine Watteau*," giving in two smaller volumes etched reproductions by Boucher, the Audrans, Cars, Cochin, Lépicié, Carle Vanloo, and other artists of

note,¹ of the master's drawings and designs, both figures and landscapes, including many of which the originals can yet be pointed out. Where this is the case we find the inimitable *coup de crayon* of the great draughtsman but imperfectly translated by the point, even though the translator be Boucher himself; but where the originals are not forthcoming, the engraved reproductions pass muster and afford some pleasure and profit. It is from them, as has been seen, that many incidental studies for still existing works have been identified, and it must not be forgotten that to this series we owe the rescue from oblivion of the best extant portrait of the artist by himself.

If we may judge by the enhanced prices obtained by Watteau's works as late as the third quarter of the eighteenth century, it must be assumed that, notwithstanding the vogue of later painters of the Louis Quinze period, his fame went on increasing as the century grew older. At the Blondel de Gagny sale in 1776 the small *Champs Elysées* (Hertford House) fetched 6,515 livres, and at the Randon de Boisset sale in 1777 the *Fêtes vénitiennes* (Edinburgh) fetched 5,999 livres.

The Marquis d'Argens, writing soon after the publication of Julienne's *Recueil*, says with fantastic exaggeration that in twenty years two pictures by Raphael will in France be exchanged for a fan painted by Watteau! Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his Notes to William Mason's translation of Du Fresnoy's poem on the *Art of Painting*, does full justice to our master's excellence "in the florid style of colouring." But after the Revolution, when David was dictator, and nothing that was not freezing Græco-Roman classicism found mercy, when the study of light and air, of colour and decorative charm, of modish elegance and aristocratic grace, became mere poisonous frivolity, the surviving masters of the eighteenth century—even artists like the great sculptor Houdon—had to change or starve, and some lesser men both changed and starved.

For Watteau, as for his brilliant successors, this is a time of total eclipse. *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* itself, still the property of the Academy, is abandoned and forgotten in one of its school-studios, and there becomes the favourite target of David's students, who pelt it with bread-bullets and cover it with their contempt and ridicule.²

¹ Both Caylus and Julienne himself contributed etchings to the *Recueil*.

² MM. de Goncourt, *L'Art du XVIII^{me} siècle*, Chardin, p. 95.

In 1826, at the Vente Denon, the great *Gilles* of the Collection La Caze—in dimensions and quality one of the most important of all Watteau's works—fetches 650 francs (Catalogue La Caze 1880)!

Now again, what a change in the other direction! Competition among connoisseurs for the finer art of the eighteenth century is carried even to the point of excess. Of public galleries there can hardly be any question, for only in the rarest cases are they rich enough to compete on this particular ground with the amateur. Watteau, for whom as one of the most inventive and exquisite artists of his age, and, indeed, of all time, no homage is excessive, takes his place in the galleries lucky enough to contain anything from his hand on equal terms with the greatest among the masters, and indeed, the possession of a Watteau confers at once a certain distinction upon the collection which it adorns.

A Watteau not of the very first rank like *L'Occupation selon l'Age*, brought, we have seen, 5,200 guineas at Christie's, while *L'Accord parfait*, its companion in the James sale, fetched 3,500 guineas. Two representative drawings, formerly in the collection of Miss James, the one, *Five Heads of Women and two of Young Boys*, the other *Three Studies of the Head of Madame Duclos*, reached respectively at the sale of the late Monsieur Josse of Paris the fabulous figures of 20,000 francs and 24,000 francs, the last being probably the highest sum ever paid for a single drawing. According to Dohme, a dealer, who must indeed have been the most audacious of mortals, some twelve years ago ventured to offer the sum of £12,500 sterling (250,000 marks) for the *Embarquement pour Cythère* in the Royal Palace of Berlin.

We no longer, like Caylus himself, and like the pseudo-Romans or David's following, range painters in an order of precedence depending on the category to which their art belongs, or care whether it be "high art" or genre, whether it be great or small according to the measurement of the professors and the pedants. If an artist may be called great because he adds a new joy, a new smile to art, because with the sunlight of his genius he transfigures the frivolous realities of an artificial time so that they stand forth created anew, glowing in the rainbow hues of poetry, yet lose in the metamorphosis no jot of essential truth, then Antoine Watteau was a great master.

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